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SERMONS,

ON A NUMBER OF

CONNECTED SUBJECTS;

IN WHICH

AN ATTEMPT IS MADE TO EXPLAIN

THE LEADING

PRINCIPLES OF REVEALED RELIGION;

TO SHOW THEIR CONSISTENCY, REASONABLENESS AND IMPORTANCE; AND TO GUARD THEM AGAINST DANGEROUS MISCONSTRUCTIONS AND FALSE INFERENCES, AND AGAINST THE SPECIOUS OBJECTIONS OF UNBELIEVERS.

BY JOHN SMALLEY, D. D.
PASTOR OF A CHURCH IN BERLIN, CONNECTICUT.

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SERMON I.*

ON THE SALVATION OF MEN, BY MEANS OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

1 CORINTHIANS I. 21.

It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.

THE apostle is here observing, how much the despised institution of a preached gospel, for the instruction of mankind in matters of religion, had triumphed over all the boasted philosophy of the learned gentile world. He says, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God"—after, in the wise ordering of Providence, human reason, on a full trial, had been found unable to ascertain the first article of a saving divine faith—"it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe."

Two questions arise respecting these words, to which particular attention will now be paid.

* Preached at the settlement of a minister; but now considerably altered, especially in the application.

What the apostle means by the foolishness of preaching: and how, by means of this, God sees fit to save lost men.

Our first question is, What are we here to understand by the foolishness of preaching?

Not, certainly, any thing in this work which is truly foolish; however much it may be vulgarly admired. We read of those, even in the days of the apostles, who crept into houses, and led captive silly people; such as were ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. And undoubtedly there have been such preachers, and such hearers, in all ages. It is said, indeed, the weak things of this world, hath God chosen and called. But that the weakest things should be truly edified, or converted, or convicted, by real nonsense, can hardly be believed. The still small voice must be heard, or after all the earth-quake, the fire, and the wind, there will be no lasting good effect. Though scripture, not reason, ought to be the preacher's oracle; yet the scripture must be made to appear consistent with reason, or we shall never make men rational nor real christians.

The apostle, in this phrase, the foolishness of preaching, must be understood ironically; or as speaking after the manner of unbelievers. He says, ver. 18, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved, it is the power of God." Both the matter, and the manner, of the primitive preachers of christianity, were thought meanly of by those who opposed themselves; more especially by the learned Gentiles.

Their manner was simple and plain; destitute, very much, of the subtilties of metaphysics, and of the flowers of rhetoric, then held in admiration. See ver. 17, of the context: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of

words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." By wisdom of words, however, is not to be understood, a skilful choice of proper expressions. Perspicuity of style ought always to be studied: nor should energy of language, on important subjects, be purposely neglected. "The preacher sought to find out acceptable words," words most pertinent and intelligible, no doubt; as well as words least liable to give unnecessary offence. And he tells us, "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies." As far as is necessary for communicating one's ideas in the clearest and most forcible manner, a studious choice of the best words, is certainly of great importance.

But by that wisdom of words with which the apostle says he was not sent to preach we may understand, what he calls in the next chapter, "Enticing words of man's wisdom." Words of deceitful flattery, and of popular self-importance, may be very properly so called. Nothing is more enticing to many hearers, than a preacher's telling them of *their* goodness; or of his own eminent piety, and great benevolence. All pedantic affectation of learning—all bombastic pomposity of language—all labored prettiness of expression, and all studied ambiguity, to escape censure by concealing one's sentiments, may also come under the idea of that wisdom of words which ought to be avoided. Some of these artifices, while they engage attention to the speaker, will divert it from the things spoken. They are all of them real faults, in any orator; but most of all are they unpardonable, in a preacher of the gospel. All of them have a tendency to make the cross of Christ, or the doctrines of christianity, of none effect. They must all be renounced, among the hidden things of dishonesty, if a preacher, by manifestation of the truth, would commend himself to every man's conscience, in the sight of God.

The manner of the apostles, though one or two of them were eloquent and learned men, was so far from all affectation of learning or eloquence, that it appeared despicable, no doubt, not only to the vulgar, who are captivated with parade and show, more than with solid substance; but also to the great adepts in science, falsely so called.

And as the apostolic manner of preaching would naturally be despised for its simplicity and plainness; so the subject matter of it, was looked upon as most contemptibly stupid and absurd. Concerning its first grand article, this is observed immediately after our text, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." Nothing could more stumble and offend the former, than telling them of the shameful crucifixion of their expected glorious Messiah; ~~who was to prolong~~ his days, and on whose shoulders, it had been foretold, the government should be laid. Nor could any thing be more the madness of folly, in the opinion of the latter, than being taught to look for eternal life, from the power and righteousness of one who had himself suffered, in weakness, the ignominious death of a most vile malefactor. This, however, was the grand hinge on which all turned that the apostles had to preach. "For I determined not to know any thing among you," Paul says to the Corinthians, "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Atonement for sin by the voluntary sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God, is the central point, to which all the types and prophecies of the law had an ultimate reference, on which the whole gospel rests, and from which all saving knowledge results. This is the basis of the church, and of all the eternal hopes of true believers. "They are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

Nor was the superstructure of the christian system, as left by these master builders, less weak, in the opinion of an unbelieving world, than this its fundamental pillar and ground of truth. It then appeared, and it still appears to many, full of hard sayings, and of most palpable self-contradictions. In the doctrines of Christ and his apostles, these stumbling-blocks are not indeed now so sensibly perceived; when people have been used to the words of the New-Testament, and used to read and hear them with erroneous explanations, or with no ideas. Still, however, some rocks of great offence, will frequently be seen by wise hearers, unless they are cautiously gone round, or covered over, by the prudent preacher. To point out these particularly in this place, our time will not now permit. Several of them will occasionally come in our way under the next head. In general, to preach the essential doctrines of the gospel without subterfuge, and in so perspicuous a manner that every one must understand them, if he will only attend, is what I take the apostle to mean by the foolishness of preaching.

II. We will now inquire how God is pleased, by such preaching, to save lost men.

"To save them that believe," the text says. And elsewhere it is said of some, "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." But we are not to understand by either of these texts, or any others, that a preached gospel can be no way beneficial to the hearers, unless they have previously saving faith. Paul was sent to the Gentiles, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among all them that are sanctified." And to the Romans he says, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?

and how shall they hear without a preacher?—So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Those who never believe the gospel, will not be saved nor profited by it; but it may have effects on such as are not yet true believers, tending to their salvation.

We will therefore consider, under the present head, how God is pleased to bless his word, when truly preached, for the conversion of sinners, as well as for the edification of saints. And,

1. By gospel preaching, God sometimes gives the unregenerate that knowledge of *himself*, which is necessary to awaken their fears of his wrath and curse, and to excite them to an anxious inquiry what they must do to be saved. "The fear of the Lord," as we are repeatedly told, "is the beginning of wisdom." And we often see, that being afraid of God, as a righteous Judge, is the beginning of serious attention in sinners to the things of religion. Careless transgressors have no fear of God before their eyes. Some of them openly declare, and all of them inwardly imagine, that the Most High, though holy and almighty, is not greatly to be feared. They hope he will not punish them, however they break his laws, abuse his grace, and are full of all unrighteousness and unmercifulness towards their fellow men. In this hope they are confirmed by the long delay of judgment, and by the present promiscuous dispensations of Providence. "All things come alike to all." The wicked live; sometimes become, and often are mighty in power. Sentence against them for their evil works is not executed. From these things they are led to presume, either that God is not much displeased at iniquity; or that he is too merciful ever to execute vengeance.

To guard against such fatal presumptions, thence arising, full provision is made in the gospel: not on-

ly by solemn verbal declarations, but also by the exhibition of a most convincing awful fact. As the ground of his present forbearance, and offers of pardoning mercy, God hath set forth his own Son, the sinner's voluntary substitute and Saviour; forsaken, wounded, bruised, and pouring out his soul unto death: it not being possible, after he had undertaken our redemption, that this cup should pass from him. Thus, as an apostle observes, "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." Thus, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." And thus, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." When once this astonishing fact in the true import of it is believed, though only with the faith of devils, the most hardened sinners will be pricked in their heart, like Peter's hearers; when they said unto him, and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

2. By the word of truth, when rightly divided, God is sometimes pleased to give sinners that knowledge of *themselves*, which is necessary to make them see their need of a Saviour, and of a sanctifier, and of sovereign grace.

Men effectually moved with fear, will soon be put upon preparing an ark, in which they may feel safe. At first, however, when sinners in Zion are afraid, they generally go about to establish their own righteousness; hoping to be justified, as it were, by the deeds of the law. Some of the grosser ways of sinning they resolve to forsake: on some of the neglected duties of religion, they determine carefully to attend. And if these good resolutions are tolerably kept for any time, they are apt to grow easier. Destruction from God is not so much a terror to them. Now they will be ready to say, "Because we are innocent," or are doing the best we can, "surely his anger shall turn from us."

To endeavor to force poor creatures out of such comfortable refuges, looks cruel; and to effect it, is one of the most difficult things in the ministry of reconciliation. But it must be done, or they cannot be saved. Nor is there any want of means which will be effectual for this end, under the co-operation of the divine Spirit. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds: Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God." Of these strong holds, the inability of sinners is the strongest —the citadel—the last resource. That they have the perfect righteousness of the law, few, if any, will pretend. Perhaps they dare not say that they have any real righteousness at all: but this they cannot have while unregenerate. Their being yet impenitent and unbelievers, they will readily acknowledge: but this they cannot help, till a new heart is given them. External duties are all that they are capable of doing, in their present condition. These, they mean to endeavor to do, in the most painful manner they are able: and doing these, they trust God will have mercy on them. If they do the best they can, with the strength and grace they have, God will surely give them more grace. So some preach: and so sinners are comforted out of Christ; and are kept from seeing themselves in a deplorable case, or in any real danger.

But the foolishness of preaching is quite otherwise. This makes no such preliminary conditions of peace with rebel men, while their minds are not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be; and while they cannot but heartily reject the glorious Saviour, and the great salvation, freely offered them. This urges external duty indeed, in all its various branches, let men's hearts be ever so bad: but it insists upon internal duties also; the duty of loving God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity. It insists that the

law of sinless perfection is still binding on all men, and is just and good; and that the gospel, which makes repentance toward God, and faith toward Jesus Christ, the lowest terms of the covenant of promise, is infinitely gracious; any inability in fallen man to keep the one, or to comply with the other, notwithstanding.

I am sensible that such preaching is still a stumbling-block and foolishness to many, as much as Christ crucified ever was to Greek or Jew: and that it will be so after all that can be said, until men are made to attend with some seriousness, and their minds are opened to receive conviction. They may be told that all their inability consists in the want of a disposition to do the things required; and that, on such a plea, common sense excuses no man, in any case. Still, however, their mouths are not stopped. Still they do not feel themselves guilty before God. Granting, say they, that all our inability does lie in the badness of our heart; yet, can we make ourselves a better heart? If not, it is no more just to condemn us for not doing the things required, than if we wanted intellectual powers, or bodily strength. But why so? Is a wicked heart no more blameable than a weak head, a broken arm, or a foot out of joint!

The thing is, those who thus reply against God, have no notion that they have a heart at all wicked; or any want of a perfectly good disposition. They mean well: their desires are sincere and good. Most readily would they do whatever is right and duty, if they could but know what it was, and if they had but strength. How then are they to blame? How, indeed, if this were actually the case! But their thinking it to be so, is one of those imaginations which must be cast down. And cast down it instantly is, when the spiritual weapons of the ministry become mighty through God: When the word, impressed by the spirit, is quick and powerful,—and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Then the

sinner's meaning well—his good desires, and sincere endeavors, are as a dream when one awaketh. It is only while men are *without the law*, that they are thus *alive*, and sin is *dead*. When the commandment comes, sin revives, and they die. They have then a conviction of *sin*. Not of that *dead* sin, which is a cloak for all sin; but of sin which is *alive*, and has full dominion over them. All their fancied excusing weakness and deadness, is then seen to be no other than the life and strength of a kind of sin which is really sinful. His own iniquities are now found to have taken the wicked himself, and he feels that he is holden with the cords of his sins. This is the horrible pit and miry clay, in which a sinner perceives himself sunk deep and held fast, when once, in the light of true conviction, he is made to know the plague of his own heart. His self-condemnation is not then the less, but the greater, because he sees himself spiritually dead, and without strength to please God, or do any thing which is truly good.

3. By what is called the foolishness of preaching, a sinner, in this deplorable condition, is enabled to discover a door of mercy, and a gleam of hope.

Isaiah, having spoken of refuges of lies and hiding places of falsehood, in which secure sinners shelter themselves, but which shall be swept away by the overflowing scourge, says; "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." And says the apostle to the Corinthians, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." But of this only solid ground of hope, a great part, in christian lands, appear not to have much knowledge. They content themselves with very superficial ideas of redemption by Christ, salvation by grace, and being justified by faith. If we attempt a rational explanation of these doctrines, such discourses are thought to be on mere

speculative points, of no practical or experimental importance. Nothing is treated with more total inattention than the very essence of the gospel. And no wonder, as long as it is imagined that if men do the best they can, with such hearts as they have, (which certainly every one must be able to do at any time,) God will be faithful and just to forgive their sins, and to cleanse them from all unrighteousness. But when a sinner's *can*, and his *will*, are found to be what they really are, the gospel report, if thought authentic, will be as cold water to a thirsty soul. Still, however, after the utmost endeavors to understand it, and to get over the difficulties attending it, under the best external instruction, the unregenerate find themselves unable to lay hold upon the hope set before them. Though persuaded that there is forgiveness in this way for repenting sinners, they cannot repent. Though convinced that Christ is the end of the *law for righteouness* to every one that believeth, they cannot believe to the saving of the soul. They cannot cordially receive this holy Saviour, and be willing that He should reign over them. They see the fault is wholly in themselves; but still they are without strength. It is the fault of their *nature*; which nothing can remove but a second birth, or a new creation. They cannot essentially alter, nor try to alter, their totally depraved disposition.

But in this forlorn case, another gospel doctrine, which is to them that perish foolishness, the desponding sinner finds to be of great importance. I mean the doctrine that in renewing men in the spirit of their mind, "God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy." This, the self-righteous spurn at; as though it cut off all encouragement to well-doing, and made the Most High a respecter of persons; arbitrary and unjust. But when a man sees that all his well-doings are dead works, and must be so till a new heart is given him, then this hated doctrine, of absolute divine sovereignty in regeneration, is the on-

ly ground of hope; the only support from utter despair.

4. By the foolishness of preaching, it pleases God to effect the actual conversion of sinners; when they are prepared for it by renewing grace, as well as by necessary convictions.

In regeneration, I conceive, the soul is wholly passive: and, of consequence, that this cannot be effected by any preaching, otherwise than as water was brought out of the rock by the rod of Moses; or than as dry bones are represented to have been raised into a living army, by prophesying to them and to the wind, in the vision of Ezekiel. The effect is not from any *power* in the means, in one case, more than in the others. But conversion, in which the soul is active, may be by the moral *power* of truth, as much as any common effects are by the power of second causes. When the stony heart has been taken away, and a heart of flesh given, the calls and motives of the gospel, to repentance, faith, and good works, will be felt, and have effect.

It is yet to be taken notice, how God carries on the begun salvation of true believers, by the ministry of his word. This institution was designed, not merely for the awakening, conviction, and conversion of sinners, but also for raising them up to the stature of perfect men in Christ. When he ascended on high, and gave gifts to men; he gave pastors and teachers, as well as evangelists, prophets and apostles, *for the perfecting of the saints.* Nor is it hard to understand how the work of the ministry is useful for the edification of true christians.

1. Hereby they are enabled to grow in divine knowledge. It is but a little portion that is known of God, and things spiritual, in this world of darkness and imperfection. But that little may be gradually increased by various means; and particularly by the preaching of the word, if people have pastors accor-

ding to God's heart, who feed them properly with knowledge and understanding. This is necessary, that they may not remain children, liable to be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.

2. By gospel preaching believers are enabled to grow in grace. Progressive sanctification is indeed the work of God; but he works by means in this case, as much as in any other. Our Saviour prayed to the Father for his first disciples; "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." When once a principle of true holiness has been created in the heart, its increase, and the peaceable fruits of righteousness of which it is productive, are as much caused by light and truth, as the growth and fruitfulness of vegetables are by rain and sun-shine; or as the growth of animal bodies is by meat and drink. Spiritual instruction is nourishing as well as delicious food, to renewed souls. "As new-born babes, they desire the sincere milk of the word," at first, and stronger meat afterwards. "that," in grace as well as knowledge, "they may grow thereby."

3. By the preaching of his word, God saves his people from sinking under present troubles and gloomy prospects; and gives them joy and peace in believing. David said to the Lord, Psalm xciv. 19, "In the multitude of my tho'ts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." And Asaph, Psal. lxxiii. having been stumbled at the outward prosperity of the wicked, and afflictions of the godly, he says, ver. 16, 17, "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." And besides the doctrine of a righteous retribution hereafter, there are several other scripture doctrines, which, if well explained, and vindicated against objections, will afford great support and comfort to true believers. Partic-

ularly, the doctrine of the saint's perseverance: That all who have once a well grounded hope, through faith in Christ, are kept by the power of God, unto final salvation. That "he who hath begun a good work in them, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." The doctrines also of God's eternal decrees, and universal Providence: that every thing is "predestinated, according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Whence it is certain that "the wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of it he will restrain:" and "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

These doctrines, though rejected as foolishness by some, and wrested perhaps by others to their destruction; are grounds of strong consolation to good men, when guardedly taught: and, instead of encouraging remissness in duty, or indulgence in sin, animate them to patient continuance in well doing, and to suffer afflictions with joyfulness.

I shall add nothing further, except a few inferences.

1. According to what has been said, the gospel ministry, if duly executed, must be a laborious occupation.

Preaching, is thought by many, an easy idle business: and it may indeed be made so by some. The blind may lead the blind, and both fall into the ditch, without much difficulty. To preach just so that it will pass, among a careless people; or even so as to be exceedingly admired by the injudicious, no great pains are necessary. But to do the work of an evangelist, and make full proof of one's ministry, on all classes of hearers, for saving them from the many crooked ways of error and sin to which they are exposed, must require uncommon attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Timothy had known the

holy scriptures from a child, and been made wise by them unto salvation; he had also that supernatural assistance which is not now to be expected; yet Paul supposed that close application was still requisite, even in his case. "Study," says he to him, "to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Besides making a natural division of texts and subjects, and a suitable application of them to persons of different characters, and under different circumstances; rightly dividing the word of truth, is to separate it, by clear and plain distinctions, from those falsehoods with which, by superficial thinkers, it is ever apt to be blended and confounded. In almost every article of faith, or rule of duty, there are errors of which people may be in danger, on the right hand and on the left. To guard against wrong principles, and wrong inferences from principles that are true; against false religion of all kinds, and against every evil and false way, requires good understanding, and great vigilance, in a spiritual guide.

2. We may see from our text, and from what has been said upon it, that preaching the gospel, though accounted foolishness by many, is a very important and most eligible employment. "This is a true saying," Paul tells Timothy, "if a man desire the office of a bishop," that is, a plain evangelical minister, "he desireth a good work." The goodness of an office ought to be estimated according to the ends which it is designed and adapted to subserve; but judging by this rule, no other work of which man is capable, can be compared with the ministry of reconciliation.

To glorify God, is the greatest good at which any one can aim; and it ought to be the chief end of all our actions: but there is no work of men on earth, which so directly tends to advance the declarative

glory of God, as explaining his holy laws, and preaching the gospel of his grace.

Next to glorifying God, doing good to men, is the best of all offices. Many callings are good in this view: they are very useful and necessary in regard to the life which now is. But the life to come is more than meat or clothing for a few days: more than healing the diseases of a frail body, which after all must soon die: more than preserving the peace of earthly societies, that will presently pass away and be dissolved. To convert sinners from the error of their way, that their souls may be saved from death; and to assist them, when converted, in running the race set before them, "that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory," is, beyond comparison, the kindest of all offices. Nor will so good a work, fail of receiving a suitable reward, if performed with fidelity. When all of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: then "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

3. Let the hearers of the gospel be hence admonished to take heed how they hear. It is a great thing to have the grace of God which bringeth salvation sent to a people; and it will be a fearful thing to have received this grace of God in vain. "Wherefore," as saith the apostle James, "lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls: But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

SERMON II.

HOW THE SALVATION OF ALL MEN, IS AGREEABLE TO THE WILL OF GOD.

1 TIMOTHY II. 4.

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

THIS was said by the apostle to enforce the duty of praying for all men; and more especially for civil rulers. See the preceding context: "I exhort, therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty: For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved," &c.

Whether the second person in the Trinity, is here to be understood by God our Saviour; or the Supreme Being without distinction of persons, may perhaps admit of some doubt. God, however, is certainly meant; and this is sufficient for my present purpose. Our text then contains two assertions; the explanation of which is now proposed.

I. That God will have all men to be saved; and,

II. That, in order to this, he will have them come to the knowledge of the truth.

I. That God will have all men to be saved, is here asserted.

But how is this to be understood! Does the apostle mean, that it is the absolute purpose of God, to effect the salvation of every individual of mankind! If so, we have in this text a decisive scripture proof, of the disputed doctrine of universal salvation. For God "is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." Many designs in a man's heart are altered or frustrated; "but the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand." If therefore it were ever the real intention of God, that the whole human race should be recovered to holiness and happiness, then every child of Adam will infallibly be thus saved.

But there are so many other texts which plainly teach the reverse of this doctrine, that these words, like many scripture assertions expressed in universal terms, must be understood with some limitation.

That men of certain descriptions, will be miserable in the world to come, we are often most explicitly assured. It is said, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." The Saviour of sinners hath told them, "Except ye repent, ye shall perish:" and, "He that believeth not, shall be damned." And afterwards, in the book of Revelation; "The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all lyars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."

Nor is it only said, that all who continue to be of those characters here, shall be thus miserable here-

after; without asserting that there will actually be any such. Our Saviour says, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way which leadeth to destruction, and many go in thereat." He hath also told us, that after the door shall be shut, "many will stand without and knock, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us:" to whom he shall say, "I know you not; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." And he adds, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out."

Nor is it a mere temporary exclusion from the happiness of heaven, and condemnation to the pains of hell, that impenitent sinners are taught to expect after death and at the last day. See Mark ix. 43, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched." And *Matt. v. 26*, "*Verily I* say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." Of him by whom our Saviour should be betrayed, he said, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born," which surely could not be true, were he finally to obtain salvation, and be happy to all eternity. Christ hath told us that in the day of judgment, he shall say to the righteous, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:" and to the wicked, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.—And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." In the parable of Lazarus, Abraham in heaven is represented as saying to the rich man in hell, "Between us and you a great gulph is fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." And in the close of the Revelation it

is said, "The time is at hand: He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still." That is, in the view of Him who inhabits eternity, the final period of changes in the characters of men is not far distant; when every one will be fixed unalterably in holiness or sin, and in happiness or misery, as his moral state shall then be found.

From these and many similar representations, it must be believed, if we believe the scriptures, not only that every one of mankind will not be recovered to holiness and happiness in this life, nor at death, nor at the day of judgment; but that they never will to all eternity. And, consequently, that it neither is, was, or ever will be, the absolute intention of God, that mankind should thus universally be saved.

And as the text we are now upon, if so construed, would flatly contradict the general evident current of scripture; so there are other constructions which it will very naturally bear.

1. The meaning of it may be, that God absolutely designs the salvation of all sorts of men: men of all nations, conditions and characters.

With as much limitation as this, the phrase *all men*, is frequently used. In this sense, or certainly not with more universality than this, we must understand our Saviour, when he says to his disciples, Matt. x. 22, "Ye shall be hated of *all men* for my name sake." And the evangelist, when he relates what was said of Jesus, John iii. 26, "The same baptizeth, and *all men* come unto him." And the historian of the apostles, when he says, Acts vi. 21, "*All men* glorified God for what was done. No more can be meant by all men, in these and many other places, than mankind generally. And in our text, considering the connection and occasion of it, to understand by all men, men of all conditions, and of all nations only, is no unnatural construction. The particular

reason of the apostle's exhorting that supplications and intercessions should be made for all men, was probably this: many of the Jewish christians still so far retained their national prejudices, that they would not pray for the heathen; looking upon them as reprobates, to whom the grace of God was never to be extended. In opposition to these bigoted narrow notions, the apostle would have them understand that now, in the seed of Abraham, all the families of the earth were to be blessed. That in Christ Jesus, there was no distinction of Greek or Jew, Barbarian, Cythian, bond or free. And therefore that they ought to pray for all men, without any of these discriminations. Or,

2. The meaning of our text may be, that God *conditionally* designs the salvation of all men; without exception of one individual: that is, provided they should hear, believe, and obey the gospel. Of the truth of *this*, there is no reason to entertain a doubt. We are abundantly assured, "With the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." Redemption enough, and mercy enough, for the salvation of every penitent believer, if all the human race should repent and believe. To this purpose, very expressly, are the words of Paul, Heb. ii. 9, "We see Jesus made lower than the angels,—that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for *every man*." And the words of John, 1 Epis. ii. chap. 1, and 2, verses, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the *whole world*."

Hence, in the parable of the royal marriage, the king is represented as sending his servants to say unto them that were bidden, "Come; for all things are now ready." This message was sent to those who refused the invitation; for which reason the lord of the feast declared, that none of them should taste of

his supper. And, without a parable, Jesus said to Jerusalem, when given over to remediless destruction; "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Accordingly, the invitations and conditional promises of the gospel, are in universal terms. See Matt. xi. 28, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." John vii. 37, "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." And Rev. xxii. 17, "The spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

I know not how to understand these passages otherwise, than as implying, that Christ hath made for the fallen race of man, in point of sufficiency, *universal redemption:* and that God is willing, and really intends, to have *all men* saved, in the most unlimited sense, *if they will.* But,

3. There is yet another sense which the words of our text may well admit, without implying the doctrine of universal *salvation.* The apostle may be understood to speak of God's preceptive will to us, and not of his own purpose. Divines often distinguish between the secret, and the revealed will of God: and with evident propriety is this distinction made, if by God's secret will be meant what he has decreed; and by his revealed will, what he has commanded. Certainly, God does not determine to bring into effect, every thing which he requires to be done by his creatures. And to no case is this distinction more applicable, than to the one now before us. Though it may not be the design of God to save every man, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; yet he may have made it our duty, not only

to comply with the proposed terms of salvation ourselves, but to bring all others to a compliance with them, as far as we are able. And this he hath evidently done.

"God now commandeth all every where to *repent*," one apostle says: "And this is his commandment," says another, "That we should *believe* on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." Christians are also required, after repentance and faith, to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Nor is it less evidently enjoined upon us, to the utmost of our power, to promote the salvation of all others. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," was the command of the risen Saviour to his first disciples. "Go out into the high ways, and bring in as many as ye shall find," was the order of the king in the parable of the great supper. God would have his servants, Christ would have his ministers and people, in their proper places, do what in them lies for the salvation of men, as universally as possible. And, with manifest propriety might this be mentioned, when the apostle was exhorting, or directing Timothy to exhort, that supplications, prayers, and intercessions, should be made for all men.

II. We will now attend to the other position implied in our text.

That, in order to men's being saved, God would have them come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Here it will be proper to consider, what things are necessary to be known; and what kind of knowledge of them it is requisite for men to have.

Respecting the former, as it opens a wide field, there will be time only just to mention those particulars which seem most essential.

1. Then, that men may be saved, they must come to the knowledge of the truth concerning God.

Though we cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection; yet we may by searching find out God, in some measure. Though it be a little portion, comparatively, that is heard or can be understood of an infinite Being; yet that little which we may understand, is of everlasting concernment to us. A knowledge of the only true God, is essential to all true religion, and to all true happiness.

We must have some just conceptions of the being and perfections of the Most High, or we cannot worship him aright, nor have any suitable affections of heart towards him. In Hebrews xi. 6, having said of Enoch, "He had this testimony that he pleased God," The apostle adds, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

And as some knowledge of the truth concerning God, is requisite that we may please him, or worship and serve him acceptably; so it is altogether necessary in order to the enjoyment of him, and to all the comfort of a well grounded hope and confidence in him. David says, in the ninth Psalm, "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." We must have some knowledge and firm belief of the righteousness, faithfulness, and goodness of God, as well as of his omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience; and also of his immutability, and all-governing Providence, or our minds cannot be so stayed on him, as to be kept in perfect peace.

2. That men may be saved, they must come to the knowledge of the truth, in some measure, concerning the divine law; which is holy, and just, and good, in all that it requires, and in all that it promises and threatens. "The law of the Lord is perfect," says the Psalmist, "converting the soul."

3. That men may be saved, they must come to the knowledge of the truth concerning sin: wherein it consists, and what it deserves.

4. In order to the salvation of men, it is necessary that they should come to the knowledge of the truth respecting themselves.

It highly concerns us to form a just opinion of our natural powers; and not to think more highly or more meanly of ourselves, in that regard, than we ought to think. The former error will make us too conceited and self-sufficient: it will make us lean to our own understanding, and rely on our own reason, in matters too high for us. The latter error will lead us to excuse ourselves more than is just, under a mistaken apprehension of inability.

But most of all does it concern us to know what manner of spirit we are of, and what is our true moral character and state. Thinking that they are rich, and increased with goods, and want nothing, in regard to godliness and virtue, is undoubtedly the cause of the ruin and perdition of multitudes. "The whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick."

5. It is necessary that men should come to the knowledge of the truth, respecting the Redeemer and Saviour of sinners. He hath said, John vi. 29, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." He hath said in his prayer to the Father, John xvii. 3, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." And without knowing the latter, what hope of salvation could be derived from the knowledge of the former? Could the Father and Lord of all be ever so clearly seen, as the fountain of living waters; yet, without the knowledge of an atoning Mediator, to us sinners, he must be seen as a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. From

a right understanding of God, as revealed in the original law of works, without any intimation of that great sacrifice for sins revealed in the law of faith, we should have had only "a certain looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Hence the holy apostle Paul, after all his personal attainments and distinctions, said; "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

6. Men must come to the knowledge of the truth concerning the terms of the gospel; or concerning what a sinner must do to be saved. The nature of repentance, and faith, and new obedience, must be rightly understood.

7. It is very necessary that the truth should be known, concerning the Holy Spirit; and his saving operations in effectual calling, regeneration, and progressive sanctification. Concerning his sealing believers unto the day of redemption; and his promised efficacious influence, preserving them from apostacy, and enabling them to endure unto the end. A right understanding of these things is requisite, at least, in order to the comforts of that hope which is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, if not absolutely necessary to salvation.

Respecting the kind of knowledge of the truth which is required, I would just observe, that men must have something more than right ideas in the head; and something more than sensible convictions of conscience, in order to their being saved. They must so come to the knowledge of the truth, as to embrace it with the heart, and obey it in the life. Without this, no doctrinal knowledge, nor convictions, however absolutely necessary, however clear, or however deeply impressive, will save men. Felix

so far understood and was convinced that he trembled, when "Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." "The devils also believe, and tremble."

It is said, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,—neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." This spiritual discernment consists, in seeing God and Christ, the law and gospel, and the promised heavenly happiness, with cordial complacency: in order to which, men must be renewed in the spirit of their minds. A disposition must be created in them, conformable to God, in righteousness and true holiness.

Let us now endeavor to collect some useful inferences, from the preceding discourse.

1. We may hence judge, whether the doctrine of universal salvation, lately propagated among us with assiduity, be a benevolent, or an unfriendly doctrine.

This doctrine has indeed a smiling aspect, at first view, and looks exceedingly charitable. The description of a strange woman given by Solomon, may, however, be applied to it with great propriety. "Her lips drop as an honey-comb, and her mouth is smoother than oil; But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps take hold on hell." The obvious tendency of this doctrine is to the destruction of men, both for time and eternity.

By taking away the powerful restraints arising from the dread of a judgment to come, it gives full liberty to the lusts of wicked men, as far as they can hope to hide their crimes from human cognizance. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed *speedily*, the heart of the sons of men, set in them to do evil," is emboldened; and many shocking enormities are commited. What then would be the case, if they could be fully assured that such sen-

tence would *never* be executed! Were it firmly and universally believed, either that no worker of iniquity would be punished at all in another world; or not any further than will be for his own greater happiness; what perilous times must we naturally expect! What frauds, what debaucheries, perjuries, robberies, and murders would every where abound! What safety would there be to him that goeth out, or to him that cometh in?

But all these are only the beginning of sorrows, in the train of so licentious a doctrine. If false, as certainly it is, if the Bible be true, its manifest tendency, is to drown men in eternal perdition. Paul gloried in preaching the gospel of Christ, it being the power of God unto salvation, as he thought; because the righteousness of God, and his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, is therein so terribly revealed. What then will be the effect of this other opposite gospel; that God hath no wrath nor righteousness, of which the greatest sinner need be afraid? Will it not be the power of Satan, to lull men in security, that they may be damned? Will those by whom it is believed, hearken to any preacher of repentance, or pay attention to any news of pardoning mercy? As far as the terror of the Lord can be of any use to persuade men; as far as any are to be saved with fear; so far the doctrine that all will infallibly be saved, tends evidently to prevent men's salvation.

Instead of thinking it strange therefore, that men who have any universal benevolence should be opposed to this doctrine; it may well be thought wonderful, that the bold propagation of so fatal a delusion, should not excite a more general alarm, and awaken a much warmer opposition! It looks as if few understood and believed the scriptures; or as if there were little concern among us for the salvation of souls, or even for the present good of society.

2. If any ask in earnest what they shall do to be saved, our subject furnishes an answer; that to be in the serious use of all proper means to come to the knowledge of the truth, is one thing necessary.

This is the counsel of Solomon: "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life." And he represents instruction in wisdom, as saying, "Blessed is he that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord."

Think not that coming to the necessary knowledge of what you are to believe, concerning God, and Christ, and yourselves, is an easy acquisition. The way in which the Bible encourages us to expect the attainment of this knowledge, is to *cry after* it, and *lift up our voice for it*; to *seek it as silver*, and *search for it as for hid treasures.*

3. From the things now said it may be seen, that we ought to be as universal in our prayers and endeavors for the salvation of men, as if we believed that all mankind were to be saved. We are not indeed to pray, or desire, that God would save the whole world, when we are persuaded he hath determined the contrary. But there is no man on earth for whom we should not pray, or whose salvation we should not promote, as far as we have power and opportunity. Since we know not which of mankind will be saved, and which will not, we may warrantably desire and seek the salvation of every one, individually considered. And we know that this is God's commanding will to us; whatever may be the secret counsel of his will, respecting his own bestowment of saving grace.

Let it then be our heart's desire and prayer to God, for all sorts of men, that they may be saved. And let us, in a particular manner, pray for kings, consuls, presidents, and all that are in authority; since their

influence will be great, for the furtherance or obstruction of the gospel. Let us pray that they may be christians, if they are not; and if they are, that they may act more like christians. That they may be nursing fathers to the true church; and not treat the religion of Christ with neglect, because his kingdom is not of this world.

And let us spare no reasonable pains or expense, that the gospel may be preached to every human creature; and that every one, both in heathen lands, and among ourselves, may be recovered from the errors of his thoughts and ways, to the wisdom of the just. There has been of late an uncommon spirit of exertion awakened, both in Europe and America, for a more extensive promulgation of the gospel, in the dark places of the earth. And certainly, there is a loud call upon christians, who are able, to contribute liberally to the furtherance of so laudable a design. But even among ourselves, great exertions are still necessary, lest gross darkness should cover the people; and lest, while the gospel is sent to others, the truth and purity of it should be taken from us. Many are the instructions which cause to err from the words of knowledge. Many, from a misunderstanding of the first principles of christianity, are falling off into fatal systems of delusion on every side. God seems to be now saying to his evangelical ministers, as it is in Hosea; "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." And as he says in Isaiah; "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-blocks out of the way of my people."

SERMON III.

ON THE DIVINE GOODNESS.

1 JOHN IV. 8.

He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.

WHAT is God? is the first question in religion, natural and revealed. Until this is rightly answered and understood, nothing can be known, as it ought to be, respecting the duty or happiness of man. We can neither know when we please God, nor why we are under obligation to fear and serve him, nor the ground we have to hope and trust in him, unless we first know what we are to believe concerning him. And yet this is a question on which, more than almost any other, men have always been bewildered in ignorance and error.

The heathen nations of old, who groped in the dim light of nature, even the most learned of them, had *gods many;* and *strange gods.* They worshipped stocks and stones, birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping thing. And to their celestial divinities—the greatest and best of them, they ascribed weaknesses and vices, animosities and contentions, similar to those among miserable and depraved mortals. After a fair and full trial of human reason, in matters of religion, "The world by wisdom knew not God."

And among those favored with the light of Revelation, there have ever been, and still are, extremely different opinions, concerning the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being: Some seem to think that God is so all-mercy, as to have no justice for men to fear: while others are thought to hold, that, toward multitudes of the noblest orders of his creatures, he is altogether unmerciful.

Now, amidst such diversity of sentiments, on this fundamental article of our theological creed, it surely concerns us to improve with carefulness, the means of information afforded us upon it, lest we should be "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

That God is a being of infinite justice, faithfulness, and mercy; as well as an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and immutable Being, we are abundantly taught in the holy scriptures. But the most concise, the most comprehensive, and, I apprehend, the most determinate idea of the divine nature, any where given us, is this in our text: *God is love.*

I shall inquire how this is to be understood; and the grounds we have to believe that it is true: after which, some attention will be paid to the former part of the verse.

I. How we are to understand this, That *God is love*, I shall inquire, and endeavor briefly to explain.

By love, must here be meant benevolence; as no one will be at any loss, who attends to the connection. This is the kind of love, no doubt, to which christians are exhorted in the verse before; "Beloved, let us love one another." And this, certainly, is the kind of love which God manifested towards us, in sending his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him, spoken of in the verse after our text. More particularly, then,

1. By its being said, *God is love*, unquestionably, we are to understand, that he is a being of most perfect universal benevolence. This is a doctrine plainly taught in other places of scripture. That the benevolence of God extends to every living creature, see Psal. cxlv. 9, "The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works." That he is kind to the unthankful, and the evil, is observed by our Saviour, Luke vi. 35. See also the words of the apostle, Rom. v. 8, "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And ver. 10,—"When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." That the divine goodness takes care of the most inconsiderable creatures, see Luke xii. 6, "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten before God."

Perfect benevolence of nature, is a disposition to promote every real good, of every one, in proportion to its importance, as far as will consist with the rights of others, and with the greatest general good. And that such is the benevolence of God, the scriptures plainly teach us to believe. But,

2. By its being said, "God is love," seems to be meant, that all his moral perfections are comprehended in benevolence. The manner of expression is singular. It is not asserted merely that God is loving, kind, or good; as elsewhere he is said to be just, true and merciful; but that he is love itself—love in the abstract. The most obvious meaning of which appears to be, that his nature is *all* benevolence. That every feeling of his heart arises from this; and that all his works and ways are resolvable into this, as their source and centre; their first cause, and last end.

II. We will now consider, the ground there is to believe, that God is thus love. And,

1. From the works of creation and Providence, which come within our own view and observation, there is great reason to conclude, that the Author and Governor of the world, is a most benevolent being.

This, at least, appears to have been the opinion of holy men of old, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Paul and Barnabas, exhorting the men of Lystra to turn from pagan idols, to serve the living God, that made heaven and earth; who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, tell them, Acts xiv. 17, "Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons." Left not himself without witness of what? Of his goodness, as well as of his existence, is most evidently meant. So in the first chapter of Romans, speaking of heathen nations, which had only the light of nature, the apostle says, "That which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and God-head: so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." It is here plainly supposed, that these Gentiles had sufficient evidence set before them in the works of creation, had they duly attended to it, to have covinced them, not only of the being and power of God, but also of his goodness. For, otherwise, how could they have been without excuse, in not glorifying him as God, or in not being thankful to him? One entitled to our gratitude, or worthy to be glorified, must be good, and not merely great.

David, likewise, long before, appears to have been of opinion that God's moral perfections, and particularly his goodness, might be learnt from his works, were men disposed to pay a proper attention to them,

and willing to believe the truth. He says, Psal. xix. 1—4, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work: Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

But can the *glory* of God be thus declared, when no convincing evidence is given of his *goodness?* Can one who is not good, however infinite his understanding and power, be a glorious being? But in another Psalm, it is said expressly, "The earth is full of the *goodness* of the Lord." And in another, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom thou hast made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great.—These all wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good."

And if we attentively consider the various capacities of animals, and more especially of mankind, for usefulness and enjoyment; and what suitable provision is every where made for their support and comfort, must we not be forcibly struck with the evidence thence arising, that the Creator and Preserver of all is a benevolent being?

It is true, we observe and experience a great deal of evil. But then, in many instances, we easily see that evil is the occasion of good; and good which we know not how it could have been brought about so well, if at all, in any other way. Generally, benevolent design is apparent through the works of creation and Providence. And though there be some creatures and events which have a contrary appearance, or which seem designed for doing hurt rather than good; yet this may well be imputed to our

ignorance of their uses and ends. Thus reason, with a very little modesty, might lead us to believe, if we had only the light of nature. But,

2. From the law and the prophets, we have much further evidence of the goodness of God, and greater reason to be satisfied that his nature is love.

All the precepts of the moral law, contained in the scriptures of the Old Testament, are evidently dictated by universal benevolence. That law enjoins nothing but what is beneficial, and forbids nothing but what is hurtful, not only to others, but even to ourselves. It is easy to see that the law, in every commandment of it, is *good*, as well as holy and just. It may easily be seen that "love is the fulfilling of the law:" or that all the law and the prophets are comprehended in these two commandments; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Now the law of God, it must be supposed, is perfectly agreeable to his nature. Bad earthly rulers may, indeed, sometimes enact good laws. They may be obliged to do so, for the sake of their own popularity or safety. But can it be thought that an Almighty Legislator, who is absolutely independent, and who has nothing to fear from any of his subjects, would have given a system of laws enjoining that in which *he* himself delighteth not? or one not perfectly expressive of his own disposition?

3. The gospel, gives us still more abundant evidence of God's infinite goodness.

In this, he hath made known to us a wonderful way provided for sinners to escape the wrath to come, and to inherit eternal life. In this we have the strongest proof, of God's infinite concern for the good of creatures who hated him without a cause, and were justly hateful to him; and, at the same time, of his infinite concern for the support of that just

government, which is necessary for the general good of the universe. "In this was manifested the love of God," as it follows immediately after our text, "because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

In the gospel, also, much light is given respecting the permission of sin and misery; and concerning other things in the ways of God, which, without this clue, might have forever appeared dark and inexplicable. See 2 Tim. i. 10, "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." And Eph. iii. 10, "To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God."

In the gospel we are informed of the happy issue of present dark appearances; and that, by the fall and redemption of men, a wise plan is executing in the Providence of God, for the most glorious display, of his power, justice and grace, to the eternal admiration and increased happiness of all the holy part of the intelligent creation; and for thus, out of partial evil, producing the greatest universal good.

4. I know of nothing in the scriptures of the Old or New-Testament, which is not fairly reconcilable with believing, that God is love—the most perfect universal benevolence.

It is said, indeed, "For *his pleasure*, all things are, and were created." But it is his pleasure to do good.

God says, of every one called by his name, "I have created him for *my glory*: I have formed him, yea, I have made him." But it is for his glory to

create beings capable of enjoying good; to form them for happiness, and to make them happy.

It is said, "The Lord hath made all things for *himself;* yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." But by the former part of this saying of Solomon, we need not understand, that God had an exclusive regard to himself in creation; so as to have no ultimate respect to the happiness of his creatures. That their good was one thing he had ultimately in view in creating many of them, we are plainly taught in the scriptures: though we are also there taught, that he regards himself, or his own glory, as the chief end of all his works. An ultimate end, is any thing which an agent aims at for its *own sake*, in however low a degree. There can be but one *chief* end of any action or undertaking; but *ultimate* ends there may be many. For instance, a man may build a house for himself, as the principal thing in view; and yet he may design it for the comfort of his family, for the accommodation of his friends occasionally, and for the lodging of strangers. The good of each of these others, may be an object in itself; and not merely in subserviency to the personal interest or honor of the owner and builder. So, it may very consistently be supposed, that God made all things for himself, as the *chief* end; while he had yet respect to the happiness of the creatures made, in different degrees, as an *ultimate* end. And if this were the case, as we are abundantly assured it was, he is then not to be thought selfish, as men count selfishness. Some have no ultimate object besides themselves, in any thing they do: others make self their object, beyond what is equal and just. But neither of these need be supposed, or is to be understood, in regard to God. He values the good of all his creatures, in itself considered. He aims at their happiness as an ultimate object: and he seeks his own glory above every thing else, no more than in equal proportion to its real superior importance.

With respect to its being said, "The Lord hath made the wicked for the day of evil;" we are not to understand by this, that their misery was any ultimate end at all with God, in creating them. The contrary he hath solemnly declared, Ezek. xxxiii. 11, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Neither the destruction, nor the least pain of any creature, however sinful, is pleasing to him for its own sake. He punishes sinners, and made them for that end, only because it is necessary for benevolent designs. Thus, as is observed, Rom. ix. 17, "The scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." Now, if thus declaring God's name, were of importance enough to over-balance all the evils brought upon this cruel, haughty, obstinate prince, neither his final destruction, nor his being raised up for that end, was at all inconsistent with God's most glorious benevolence. The same holds true of all other instances of his punishing justice; and of every link in the chain of Providence, by which such awful events are brought to pass. That the punishment of the wicked was a part of God's eternal plan, and that he made them for the day of evil, in this sense, must be admitted. But that this was only because he saw it necessary for the greatest general good, must be believed, if we believe his word. And in this way, all that is seen or said, of the wrath and vengeance of God, may be accounted for, in a good consistency with the belief that his nature is love: or that, in all things, his ultimate motive is pure benevolence. When he hateth all the workers of iniquity, he bears them no ill will. When he inflicts the most terrible punishments upon them, it is not from any delight he takes in their misery, or from any want of a friendly disposition towards them. As a tender father doth not cease to love an offending

child, when most displeased with it, and when, for its own good, or the good of his other children, or for the support of his own authority and honor, he is obliged to punish it; so neither doth the universal Parent cease to love, with benevolence, his rebellious creatures, even the most criminal of them; though he will not spare them, when, for any good ends, of sufficient importance, their punishment is seen necessary. When his regenerate and adopted children are undutiful to him; when "they break his statutes, and keep not his commandments; he will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, his loving kindness he doth not take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail." And though he "is angry with the wicked every day;" yet he pities them, and often waits long for their repentance, that deserved vengeance may not be executed upon them. Nor are we to imagine that he ceases to be benevolent, even towards those his enemies, who, finally, will not have him to reign over them, and whom he casts off for ever.

5. As far as we are able of ourselves to judge what is right, it must be believed, that all the moral perfections of God are comprehended in benevolence, if we believe him altogether glorious. Nothing but this, or what proceeds from this, I am persuaded, can be approved by any man's conscience, when well considered, as a moral perfection. Anger, wrath, vengeance, are amiable, when benevolence inspires them, and when good only, is ultimately intended by them. On the other hand, when this is not the case, even truth and justice, do not commend themselves to the feelings of the most upright man, I presume, as being laudable. If need be, the truth should be spoken, and justice should be done; but when there is no need of it, what glory can there be in speaking the one, or in doing the other? Be-

nevolence, according to common sense, is the soul of every virtue, or moral excellency.

Not that a good end, will sanctify unrighteous means; as some have infered from the benevolent system. Truth must never be violated, nor injustice done; because either of these would be destructive of general good. If *men* were at liberty to speak falsely or defraud, whenever they might think it would do more good than hurt, in particular cases, we could have no confidence in one another; and no man's property, or reputation, or life, would be in any safety. And if it were possible for *God* to lie, or to treat his creatures unrighteously, we could never trust in him, or know what to expect from him. Still, however, that neither justice nor truth, nor any thing else, is a virtue in man, or a moral perfection in God, further than it proceeds from a benevolent disposition, I believe, when duly thought of, must be the decision of every man's conscience. That God is love, as now explained, seems necessary to be believed, in order to a rational conviction of his being altogether lovely.

We will now pay a brief attention to the former part of our text; and inquire how it is to be understood, that *he that loveth not, knoweth not God.*

By him that loveth not, is evidently meant, one who has no true benevolence: nothing, in exercise or principle, of that love which is the fulfilling of the law. And under this character, it is plain, the apostle means to comprehend every unregenerate sinner: for in the next preceding verse he says, "Every one that loveth, is born of God."

But we are not to understand, that natural men, however entirely destitute of true benevolence, are incapable of every kind of knowledge of the Supreme Being. Of his natural perfections—his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, they may have as

just conceptions as good men have. And they may have some idea and conviction of God's moral perfections—his justice, truth and goodness.

There are two respects, however, in which it may be truly said, "He that loveth not knoweth not God."

1. Compared with good men, he has not a clear conception of what is meant by the divine benevolence. We get the idea of many things by experience, with an exactness which can no other way be obtained. Of one who has never felt hard pain, we say, He knows nothing what it is. We say the same of one who has never experienced parental affection. That no one can get the full idea of these feelings, without experiencing them, is indisputable. Thus also we get the most perfect knowledge of human nature. The apostle to the Corinthians says, "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man that is in him." He adds, "Even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." Any endeavors to explain the divine benevolence, to one who has not been transformed into the likeness of it, by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, must be somewhat, though not altogether, like attempting to give a blind man an idea of colors. The unrenewed, from the experience they have of humane compassion, of love for near relations, and of other partial friendships, may have some very faint partial idea of the feelings of Him who is good to all. Still however, they will be exceedingly apt to conceive of God, as though he were altogether such an one as themselves. Any one may be convinced, from analogy in other matters, that those who have been created after God in true holiness, will thence be able to form an idea of the holiness of God, with a degree of correctness, of which the unholy are incapable. But,

2. There is a *kind* of knowledge of God, which is entirely peculiar to good men. I mean, a heart-felt knowledge of his amiableness. He that loveth not, and has no disposition to God-like love, can have no *delightful* perception of any of the divine attributes; however well they might be *speculatively* understood. This is that perception of which the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. iv. 6, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." This kind of knowledge, none but men of an honest and good heart, can possibly have. The carnal Jews had raised expectations of their promised glorious Messiah; yet, on his actual appearance, they received him not. It proved as was foretold in Isaiah: "When we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him: He is despised and rejected." The reason is obvious. Their desires of salvation, and his saving designs, were far from coinciding. And a like opposition there always is, between the purposes of God, and the wishes of fallen men. *He* is good to all; *they* want to have him good only to themselves, and to their friends. He proposes to make them happy by turning them from their iniquities: it is their heart's desire and prayer, to have earthly riches and power, and liberty to enjoy the pleasures of sin.

To a mind universally benevolent, the universal benevolence of the great Parent of all, appears glorious: but to a man of a totally selfish or partial disposition, it cannot so appear. No one can be pleased with a disposition in another to promote, that which he cares nothing about, or wishes not to have promoted.

Let us now see what useful inferences will follow, from the subject we have been considering.

1. From the things last said we may learn, that there is no impropriety in attempting to instruct the

unregenerate, in matters of religion; nor any reason why they should think it in vain to pay attention to divine instruction, because of the blindness of their hearts. They are not altogether like the horse and mule, which have no understanding. A rational conviction they may get, or may be given them, of God's all-seeing eye that is upon them, of his power and justice to punish them, and of his grace and mercy to save them; and such a conviction is one thing necessary, in order to their conversion and salvation.

2. It hence appears that the incapacity of sinners, while unrenewed, to come to the *saving* knowledge of God, is of such a nature as cannot render them at all excusable, in this kind of ignorance. It is owing merely to their total want of a benevolent disposition: and this is what we always condemn in others, and ought to condemn in ourselves. Yet,

3. It is evident from our text, and the things now said upon it, that the incapacity of those who have not been born again, to know God so as to love him, is such as can be removed by nothing but a radical change of heart. Did natural men only labor under misapprehensions concerning God, rectifying their mistakes would be enough to reconcile them to him. Were their blindness to his glory, owing to any weakness or disorder in their intellectual powers; a physical operation on the brain might be sufficient; or, if any thing supernatural were necessary, it would be only to give them better *heads*. But if the bottom of the difficulty with them, lies in their not being of a benevolent disposition; a better *heart* must be given them, before they can be brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, or have any spiritual discernment of divine things.

4. From what has been said of the evidences set before us, that God is love, we may be helped to

judge where the truth lies, respecting the sufficiency of the light of nature, in matters of religion.

Infidel writers have often labored to prove, that the visible works of God teach us, with sufficient clearness, all that is needful to be known concerning him: whence they conclude, that the Bible is unnecessary; and therefore, not from God.

In opposition to this, some of late have advanced, that from the light of nature, there is no reason to believe the moral perfections of God; or to think that he is a good being.

The first of these opinions ought to be rejected, I apprehend, as utterly unfounded and false: but yet the last, it appears to me, is carrying the matter too far: farther than is needful, or safe, or true. The Bible itself, as hath now been observed, seems plainly to assert, that the glory of God is declared, by his works of creation and common Providence: and that the heathen were without excuse, because that when they knew God, by these means, or might have known him, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful. Does not then asserting that, from the things which are seen, there is no reason to think that God is worthy to be glorified, or that we have any reason to be thankful to him, look like contradicting the scriptures, to show the necessity of them, and to induce men to believe them?

And if we attend to the works of nature ourselves, as holy men of old have done, will it not be rational to acknowledge, that all objections to the goodness of God, arising from apparent evils, amount to no more than difficulties, which reason alone would not be able to solve? But how often is it the case respecting most demonstrable truths, that there are things which seem irreconcilable with them? Even after revelation, and in revelation itself, there are some things hard to be reconciled. We must fall into very universal scepticism, if we will believe nothing till all difficulties can be removed. In the

case before us, as the preponderating evidences from all nature, are in favor of the goodness of its divine Author; so, I am apprehensive that the cause of religion will be rather injured than promoted, by any attempts to invalidate those evidences. Such attempts, I am afraid, will be more likely to drive deists into atheism, than to bring them to believe the scriptures.

Nor do I see any occasion we have for taking this ground, in our disputes with unbelievers. Admitting that the light of nature would give some knowledge of the true God, were men perfectly well disposed, and thoroughly attentive; still it is certain that fallen depraved men, have not hitherto felt after him and found him, groping in this glimmering light alone: and from the long trial made, it is strongly to be presumed they never would.

Certain also it is, that there are things concerning God, of the last importance to be understood by sinners, which, without a divine revelation, never could have been known at all, by men or angels. If the light of nature might have taught us that God is good; yet how could any creature have known by it, that he was ready to forgive, or that with him was plenteous redemption? Redeeming love, renewing grace, pardoning mercy, and giving eternal life to the ungodly, are parts of the glory of God, which the heavens do not declare. What a sinner must do to be saved, or whether he can be saved at all, the firmament showeth not. Though their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world; yet, on these all-interesting subjects, they have nothing to say. These breadths and depths, are far beyond their line.

Now, what broader or better ground do we want, for asserting the necessity of revelation? Why should we wish to depreciate the light of nature any further? Let it be enough to leave men without excuse. Let it be sufficient, if any please, for guid-

ing attentive sinless beings, into all necessary truth. For us, fallen, stupid, guilty creatures, certainly, it is altogether insufficient.

5. Let us then look to the word of God, and not rely upon our own reasoning from his goodness, for our conclusions respecting the salvation of sinners.

Because the Most High is called the Parent of the universe, and is said to be good unto all, some will hastily conclude, that he hath no wrath for the workers of iniquity to fear; nor need they seek his grace. They conceive of him under the fond idea of an indulgent father of our flesh, who will suffer his children to abuse one another, and to treat him with all possible irreverence and disobedience; and will only say, "My sons, why do ye these things?" without ever restraining or punishing them. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." He hath said to the sinner, after enumerating his evil deeds, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now, consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." It is written, "Men shall fear the Lord, and his *goodness*, in the latter days." And indeed, when his goodness comes to be rightly understood, it must lead men to stand in awe, and not sin. The more perfectly benevolent we believe the almighty Governor of the world, the more reason have saints to venerate him, and sinners to tremble before him. That he will punish sin, as far as is necessary for righting the injured, for restraining iniquity, and for promoting the greatest general good, we may thence be certain. And whether, for these good ends, judgment must not be laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, in all cases, we could never have known, without a revelation from Him. That all men will be saved, or that any sinner will escape deserved punishment;

is a bold inference for the reason of man, from the mere perfections of God. Arguing thus, is to exercise ourselves in great matters, and in things too high for us. But when we are assured by the pen of inspiration, that God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, the vilest sinner need not fear, as some have been ready to do, that their sins are too great to be forgiven. Infinite goodness may then be a safe ground of confidence, that where sin hath abounded, if we repent and believe the gospel, grace will much more abound.

Hearken, then, to the gracious proclamation from heaven; Isa. lv. 7—9, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

SERMON IV.

ON THE JUSTICE OF GOD, IN THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

ROMANS XII. 19.

—Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

SOLOMON says, "I considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and, behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter." Such instances, which are still often to be seen, are apt to excite our compassion and indignation: But what can our indignation or our compassion avail? It is not often in the power of our hands to punish, or to rescue and protect. We can neither put down the mighty, when they are cruel and unrighteous; nor help the weak, when they suffer wrong. In cases of this nature, we have generally no other way to console ourselves, but by confiding in the justice and power of God. By believing that He is greater than all, and that His judgment is according to truth. That He will certainly right the injured, and recompence the way of evil doers upon their own heads. This consolation God gave to his people of old, in Deut. xxxii. 35, where, speaking of those cruel

enemies that were too powerful for them, he says, "To me belongeth vengeance and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things which shall come upon them make haste." To this the apostle in our text refers, for the comfort of persecuted christians, and to guard them against seeking retaliation, or meditating revenge. The whole verse is; "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

It is proposed to show, in the ensuing discourse,

I. How we are to understand, that vengeance is God's.

II. The reasons we have to believe that He will repay; and,

III. That all fears or hopes of the contrary, are utterly groundless.

How we are to understand that vengeance is the Lord's, in the first place, I shall endeavor to explain.

By *vengeance*, when ascribed to God, I would observe, is not to be understood the same, in all respects, as is generally meant by *revenge*. In common speech, it is true, these are often nearly synonymous expressions; and so they are sometimes used in scripture. Thus in Deut. xxxii. 41, 42, God says, "If I whet my glittering sword, and my hand take hold on judgment, I will render *vengeance*, &c. from the beginning of *revenges* upon the enemy." And in Nahum it is said, "The Lord revengeth; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries." But then, it ought to be understood, that revenge is very different in God, from what it is in wicked, or in

weak imperfect men. In them, it is commonly tinctured with malignity, or ill will towards the offender. Of Simeon and Levi, Jacob said, "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel." And this is often the case with men, when they recompense evil for evil. But though we read of the fierce anger of God, yet nothing of cruelty, nor any want of kindness, is ever attributed to the Almighty. The fierceness of his wrath is not a bitter passion; nor any passion at all. It is only an infinite opposition to iniquity, and an omnipotent disposition to discountenance it, for benevolent purposes.

It is to be observed, however, that by his vengeance, spoken of in our text, is evidently meant, *vindictive* justice; and not that fatherly correction which is intended for the good of the subject. A distinction is often made in scripture, between the chastisement of good men, and judgments sent upon the irreclaimably wicked. Of the former we read, Isa. xxvii. 9, "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin." And in the eleventh Psalm it is said; "The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked, and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup." The trials and corrections of God's regenerate children, are rarely, if ever, expressed by the name of vengeance. And it is very evident that the vengeance spoken of in our text, and in Deuteronomy, from which our text is a quotation, means such punishment of the enemies of God's people as should terminate in their ruin, not in their reformation. It is rendering a just retaliation to them, according to the full demerit of their evil deeds.

Let us now consider, more particularly, how we are to understand that such vengeance is the Lord's.

1. Undoubtedly it is to be understood, that inflicting deserved punishment on all evil doers, of right, belongs to God. The truth of this cannot be disputed. Certainly, if any one can have a right to punish iniquity in any case, the Supreme Being has an unquestionable right to do it in all cases. His rightful authority to punish any one who deserves punishment, is most evident, because he is the Creator, Preserver, and absolute Proprietor of all. As it belongs to a father to chasten his own children, and to a master to correct his own servants: so, and much more, does it belong to God to punish his own creatures, when they do amiss. He must have an undoubted right to govern all rational creatures, because he hath made them, and in him they live, and move, and have their being.

2. God's saying vengeance is mine, implies, that rendering adequate punishment for iniquity, belongs to him alone. This likewise, is indisputable. No one can have a right to punish His creatures, except by authority derived from Him. "Who art thou," says the apostle, "that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." And in our context he enjoins it upon christians, "Recompense to no man evil for evil." The civil magistrate may indeed, and must do this, in a degree, in some cases; but then he does it by divine appointment. Rom. xiii. 4, "For he is the minister of God; a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." His power to avenge the injured, and to punish the injurious, is only a delegated power: and this delegation is also very limited. Earthly rulers, the highest of them, are not authorized to punish all kinds of iniquity; nor any, according to their full demerit. The punishment of crimes belongs to them, only so far as is necessary for the present safety and peace of society. It is just, and on a larger scale, it may be necessary, that natural evil

should be recompensed for moral evil, in all cases, to the utmost of its desert. But this, He who inhabiteth eternity, hath reserved to himself.

3. Another evident truth, which may be implied in this saying of God, is, that he alone is able to award and execute righteous vengeance,

No one besides has knowledge sufficient, to judge always what is just and right, in rendering punishments for crimes. Man looketh only on the outward appearance: nor is it more than a very small part of the external actions of sinners, that falls under the immediate inspection, or can come to the certain knowledge, of the wisest human judges. They must depend, for the judgment they pass, upon the testimony of others. And hence they are very liable to clear the guilty, for want of evidence; or to condemn the innocent, through the falsehood or mistakes of witnesses. But "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." No darkness, nor distance, can prevent his perfect view of all that is done, or hearing of all that is said. 1 Sam. ii. 3, "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed." And Jer. xvii. 10, "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways." All the motives and principles from which any act, are fully open to His all-seeing eye: and these are of the greatest importance in weighing with exactness, the merit or demerit of moral actions.

Rendering just punishment is also peculiar to God, because no one else has power sufficient to execute deserved vengeance, in all cases, or indeed, in any case. The most absolute and most mighty potentates of the earth, are often unable to crush formidable rebellions, or to punish powerful offenders. But against the Almighty, all resistance and combination are in vain: "He is wise in heart and mighty in strength," says Job; "who hath hardened him-

self against him and hath prospered."—"God hath spoken once," says David, "twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." And hence it is said by Solomon, "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."

In no case are men able to inflict that punishment which is the full wages of sin. As our Saviour observes, they can at furthest only kill the body; after that there is no more that they can do: but God, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.

Having endeavored to explain how it is to be understood, that vengeance is the Lord's; let us consider, as was proposed,

II. The reasons we have to believe that he will repay. That is, will punish impenitent evil workers, with strict justice. And,

1. We have reason to believe this, from what he hath said.

Many declarations to this purpose in his word, all who have read their Bibles may easily recollect. See, as a specimen, Deut. xxxii. 39, 40, 41, "I, even I, am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift my hand to heaven, and say, I live forever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me." Isa. xxviii. 17, "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuges of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding places." Isa. lix. 18, "According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence."

Ezek. xxii. 14, "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it." And 2 Thes. i. 7, 8, 9,—The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

2. That God will repay sinners with righteous punishment, we have reason to believe from what he hath done. By the judgments which he hath already executed, it is put beyond all reasonable doubt, that iniquity shall not go unpunished. Thus the apostle Jude argues: having spoken of certain ungodly men that had crept into the churches, who turned the grace of God into laciviousness, he says; "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, in like manner giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." That is, their destruction is left upon sacred record, as a warning to all others, and as an emblem of the final punishment of sinners in the fire which shall never be quenched. The destruction of the old world, of the Egyptian host, of Babylon, and of Jerusalem, may be considered as similar examples. And so may the destruction which has come upon innumerable other cities and nations, as well as upon individual sinners, in fulfilment of divine threatenings.

3. That God will take vengeance on the workers of iniquity, is agreeable to the natural apprehensions of mankind, both bad and good. When the ship which carried Jonah was like to be broken with a tempest, and the mariners saw themselves ready to perish, notwithstanding all their efforts and prayers, they said; "Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is come upon us." When the men of Melita saw a viper come out of the fire which they had kindled, and light upon Paul's hand, they said among themselves; "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live." When *Herod* heard of the fame of Jesus, on account of his astonishing miracles, he said, "It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him." Others had different conjectures; but this was Herod's confident opinion: and it was probably suggested to him by his conscience, which made him apprehensive of the awful justice of God. Such apprehensions are natural to men. Those who are conscious of great crimes, cannot but entertain fearful forebodings that God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment. And those who have suffered great injuries, expect justice from heaven, if they can obtain no redress on earth. Solomon says, "I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there, and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked." Abraham, likewise, was confident that the Judge of all the earth would do right. And from this strong expectation, it has often been matter of wonder to good men, that notorious transgressors should be spared, and suffered to enjoy prosperity, so long as they sometimes are. See Job xxi. 7, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" And Psal. lxxiii. 12, and

16, 17, "Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.—When I thought to know this it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." Yea, so natural and universal is the certain expectation of equitable rewards and punishments, if there be a just God, that wicked men have called in question the being of such a God, because at present all things come so much alike to all.

Such are the strong grounds we have to be fully persuaded, that the holy Governor of the world will render a terrible recompence to sinners, for their ungodly and unrighteous deeds. I proposed to show,

III. That any hopes or fears of the contrary, are altogether groundless.

The grounds on which some flatter themselves that God will not be strict to punish any sinners, are, the universal goodness of his nature; the plenteous redemption there is with him, through the propitiation of his Son; his declared readiness to forgive, and the long delay of his threatened vengeance. These, therefore, it will be proper here particularly to consider; and to show that there is no reason to apprehend, from either of them, that those who die in their sins will not be punished according to strict and perfect justice.

1. There is no reason to think this, because of the infinite, universal goodness of God.

It is true, we read, "The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works:" and that, "God is love." But then, this is so far from giving any reason, to believe he will never punish, let men be ever so bad, that it affords the strongest ground for confidence that he certainly will. One who is good to all, when he sees any suffer wrong, if he have rightful authority and sufficient strength, will

avenge him who is oppressed, and smite the oppressor. Justice is essential to universal goodness. A good man and a just, are synonymous appellations in scripture; and the former character obviously implies the latter. Universal benevolence will dispose one to do justly, in every relation he sustains, or capacity in which he is called to act. A good ruler, certainly, is one that beareth not the sword in vain: one who is a terror to evil doers, that he may be a protector of them that do well. But if he that ruleth over men, in the character of a civil magistrate, must be just; how much more desirable and necessary is this, in Him who ruleth over all? As far as is requisite for supporting government, and securing the greatest public good, and the rights of every individual, vindictive justice is evidently an essential branch of universal goodness. And that these good ends do not require the punishment of all sin according to its full demerit, or something equivalent to it, in the extensive administration of God, we have certainly no reason to be positive. Any conclusion that the Judge of the universe will never punish crimes, or not strictly and fully, because he is infinitely good; can be grounded only on the stupid supposition that we know as well as he, what is wisest and best.

2. There is no reason to think that God will not now, in any case, punish the sins of men, according to strict justice, because of the atonement which has been made for them by the death of his Son.

Some have supposed, that Christ hath so purchased salvation for sinners of the human race, that God is obliged in justice to save them all. That their sins have been so punished in their surety, that it would be unjust to punish them in their own persons: and that eternal life has been so merited for them, that they can claim it as a just debt.

But this is a supposition most palpably absurd in itself, as well as contrary to the plainest representations of scripture. Crimes are not to be cancelled, or the ill desert of them taken away, even by personal sufferings; and much less by the sufferings of another; though a proper foundation may thus be laid for the gracious pardon of them. Nor can the Creator of all, become obligated as a debtor, by any merit; though a door may thereby be opened for the honorable bestowment of undeserved favors. Accordingly, in the third chapter of Romans, the apostle having said, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," he proceeds to speak of, "Being justified *freely* by his *grace*, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins —that he *might* be *just*, and the justifier of him that beliveth." This was done, the apostle observes, "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might *grace* reign, through *righteousness*, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." Notwithstanding, therefore, the sufficiency of the atonement of Christ for all men; no man has any claim to an exemption from the curse of the law, until he embraces the gospel: nor then, in point of justice; but merely on the ground of God's gracious promise.

If it should still be said, as some are ready to say, supposing the atonement of Christ be only sufficient to render the salvation of all men *consistent* with justice, may we not conclude from the goodness of God, that all will actually be saved?

To this it may be answered; not unless we are wise enough certainly to know that the best purposes, upon the whole, would thus be answered. There is no more reason to conclude this, than there was before the fall of men or angels, to have concluded that no sin or misery would ever have been permitted, by a Being of infinite goodness and power.

There was no more necessity, in point of justice, that any creature should have been suffered to fall, than there is now, that some of mankind should be left to perish in their sins. God does not do whatever he could, without any violation of justice; but only what he judges to be wisest and best. If, therefore, it seemeth *good* in his sight, he will leave many of the human race to be forever sinful and miserable, notwithstanding the universal sufficiency of the atonement of Christ. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" Shall a worm of the dust arrogate this knowledge! and assume this office? "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" Shall vain man, born like the wild asses colt, say unto him, Why doest thou thus! It would certainly be wiser, more benevolent, and more glorious, to make *all* vessels of mercy!

The death of Christ was designed to give such a striking example of the justice of God, that, while mercy should be exercised in this way, men might stand in awe, and not sin. Our Saviour, when going to be crucified, said to the women that followed him weeping, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.—For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Shall we then be so wise as to draw from it the contrary conclusion; that, since the green tree hath been so terribly burnt, no dry tree has any thing to fear! That since the just one, when voluntarily standing in the place of sinners, was not spared, the unjust may be unjust still, with perfect safety!

3. There is no reason to think that God will never be strict to punish iniquity, because of his present forbearance; nor because of his declared readiness to forgive.

The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, it is true; and hence sinners may be apt to flatter themselves with hopes of final impunity, though they continue impenitent. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." But to be emboldened to sin, by God's keeping silence, is as hazardous, as it is abusive and ungrateful. Rom. ii. 4, 5, 6, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance: But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds."

As to God's declared readiness to forgive; this is only on certain conditions. "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But without repentance, and faith in Christ, it is as expressly declared, there is no remission of sins. See Psal. lxviii. 21, "God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses." Heb. ii. 2, 3, "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" And chap. x. 26, 27, "For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins; but a certaing fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

By way of inference and improvement;

1. From the preceding observations on this subject, it appears, that vindictive justice is an amiable divine attribute. A God unjust would be a God unkind. It is common to call some of the divine perfections amiable, and others awful: as if those alone deserved our love, while these demanded only our fear. But rightly understood, they are all amiable; they are all awful: amiable to saints, and awful to sinners. On the cross of Christ they were all harmoniously displayed, in their highest glory. "Mercy and truth there met together; righteousness and peace kissed each other." Indeed, mercy, truth, and justice, in the Supreme Governor of the world, it is evident, are equally essential parts of universal benevolence.

2. Hence we may learn how to account for it, that punishing justice is an attribute of God which mankind do not naturally love, and are very loath to believe. It must be owing to their own unrighteousness.

But all men profess to wish for just earthly rulers: and such a character as that of Job in the days of his power, who delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him: who put on righteousness, and it clothed him; whose judgment was a robe and a diadem: who searched out the cause which he knew not; and broke the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth—Such a character, when found in remote history, is universally admired. How then does it come to pass, that so many would fain believe the Supreme Ruler over all to be of a quite opposite character?

This inconsistency, I think, is thus to be accounted for. Every man's conscience is on the side of justice; but every man is not upright in heart. Hence though a just judge, when far enough off, will

be admired by all; yet, when too near, and considered as one with whom *we* have to do, many want to have him a greater friend to liberty. All wish to have strict justice done, in punishing their enemies, and the enemies of those for whom they have a particular friendship: but one that will punish them, or their friends, whenever they do amiss, is a character which the most cannot bear. Hence, though a God partially righteous, like themselves, would be very agreeable, yet not one altogether just. "He that is upright in the way," Solomon says, "is abomination to the wicked." And if this be a true proverb, we need not wonder that a fallen wicked world would not have the Judge of all the earth always do right.

3. From the things which have been said, it may be seen, why the christian religion does not allow of personal revenge, or of recompensing evil for evil.

It is not because making men suffer for their crimes is a thing wrong in itself; provided it be done by proper authority, in due proportion, and for necessary good purposes.

But it is because bearing a grudge, or harboring malicious revenge, is never right. This is inconsistent with being the followers of Christ, who prayed for his murderers on his cross; and inconsistent with being the children of God, who is good unto all. It is because men are neither competent nor impartial judges, of the recompence due for supposed injuries done them. We know not the hearts of men; nor their words and actions, very often, except by uncertain information: and in our own case, when injured or affronted, we are exceedingly liable to misjudge, through selfishness and passion. Were every man to avenge himself for wrongs received, according to his own ideas and feelings, very wild work would be made in the execution of distributive justice. Lastly, we are forbidden this, because there is no occasion for avenging ourselves with our own

hands. Recourse may commonly be had to earthly tribunals, which are more impartial: and if evil doers escape punishment from men, except they repent, there is no way for them to escape the righteous judgment of God. Sooner or later, all who commit iniquity, will be made to know that it is an evil and bitter thing. Instead therefore of wishing to do men any evil, whatever they may have done to us; we ought rather to pray for them, that by experiencing only the necessary bitterness of repentance, they may escape the more terrible pains of eternal punishment.

4. We should make it our chief care and concern, while we judge and condemn others, that we ourselves do not fall under the righteous judgment of God. Let all be warned to flee from the wrath to come; and not to flatter themselves that they shall have peace, though they walk in the way of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes. If the Bible be true, all such hopes are certainly vain. "For," it is written, "the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. Now, therefore, be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong." Let sinners be exhorted, as the only way of safety, to flee for refuge, and lay hold upon the hope set before us in the gospel. To repent, in this only space of repentance, and pray to God for pardoning mercy, through the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, which cleanseth from all sin. "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near."

SERMON V.

ON THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

JOB XXIII. 13.

But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth.

IN this chapter, Job expresses his grief and vexation of spirit, in a very moving and pathetic manner. See ver. 2, "Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning." And if we duly consider all the circumstances of his unhappy situation at this time, we shall not wonder that he was ready to sink in despondency, or that the patientest man should be brought at last thus bitterly to complain. For, under his complicated strokes of adversity, from the immediate hand of God, or from the permitted malignant agency of the grand adversary —under the sudden loss of all his substance, and of all his children, and the most distressing bodily pains, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet; he not only had no one on earth to console him, but not one, it seems, but what was against him, and ready to add to his affliction. His wife appeared rather to upbraid and insult him; saying, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die." His three greatest and best friends, who came

from afar on this melancholy occasion, on purpose to condole with him; though wise and good men, yet from a common mistake concerning the ways of Providence, they proved, as he calls them, miserable comforters. Supposing that men were always dealt with in this world, very much according to their moral characters, they concluded that Job must have been an extremely wicked man, notwithstanding his former reputation for piety and virtue, or he would not have been visited with such singular divine judgments. And hence they exerted all their powers of argumentation and rhetoric, to bring him to a confession of gross hypocrisy.

Now, in such a state of complicated troubles, when all other sources of consolation were shut up, how natural and necessary is it for a good man to refer his cause to God, and seek help and support from him? But even this last resource of a suffering saint, seems now to have been denied to Job: for he says, ver. 3 and 4, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." And ver. 8, 9, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." Job wanted to reason with God, one would suppose from these complaints, not being able to comprehend the goodness, or perhaps the righteousness, of these his present strange dispensations.

In this view of the foregoing words, our text may be considered as Job's recollection of himself, and calling to mind the folly of expostulating with the Most High, respecting what he had done, or of thinking to alter his purposes in regard to what he was about to do. "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth."

The meaning of the words is plain and easy to be understood: namely, that God is unalterable in his determinations. That he never changes his counsels; and that no one can move him to alter his mind in any instance. That what he once designs, he always does, let what arguments or entreaties will be used, to persuade him to the contrary.

And as the meaning of Job is very obvious, so the sentiment he here expresses is very evidently true. For,

1. Such unchangeableness is often ascribed to God, and claimed by him, in the holy scriptures. See Psal. xxxiii. 11, "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever; the thoughts of his heart to all generations." Isa. xlvi. 9, 10, "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." Mal. iii. 6, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." And James i. 17, "Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

2. Such immutability in God, may certainly be concluded from his other perfections—his infinite power, knowledge, and goodness.

To be fickle and given to change, is ever considered as an imperfection in a man; surely then nothing like this ought to be supposed in the all-perfect God. The wisest and most steady men do indeed often alter their minds; and it is often wise and necessary for them to do so. They cannot always foresee how things will turn out, or what incidents may happen. Objections to their plans, unthought of at

first, frequently arise in the prosecution of them, or occur to their thoughts on more mature consideration. Men are sometimes obliged to desist from their designs because of the opposition they meet with from some, or the failure of others on whom they depended for help. They are sometimes induced to alter their purposes by convincing arguments suggested to them; and sometimes, when not convinced it is best, are overcome by the earnest entreaty of friends, whom they cannot bear to disoblige. But to a Being who is infinite in power and knowledge, and in every moral perfection, no such causes of alteration are possible. "Known unto God are all his works," and every thought relative to them, "from the beginning of the world." No new consideration can occur, or be suggested to him, as a reason for changing his mind; nor will he ever be over-persuaded to alter any purpose of his heart without reason; and none can stay his hand.

Thus indisputably evident is it, both from particular texts of scripture, and from the other revealed attributes of God, that he is in one mind, and none can turn him. Nevertheless, there are objections against this doctrine, or apparent difficulties relating to it, which deserve some attention.

1. Several texts will readily occur, which appear to assert the contrary. We are told, Gen. vi. 6, "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." It is said concerning his people, Psal. cvi. 44, 45, "He regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented, according to the multitude of his mercies." And in Jer. xviii. 7, 8, God says, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: If that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their

[redacted] ment [redacted] that I thought to do [redacted]

These texts, and some others, seem to imply, not that [redacted] mind, but is turned from its purpose [redacted] to regret having executed them, sometimes by the wickedness, and sometimes by the repentance and prayers of his creatures. But it is very certain that all such texts are to be understood only as figurative representations, accommodated to our thoughts and ways; or as speaking after the manner of men. We also read of the arm of the Lord, and of his hand and eyes, yet no one, unless grossly ignorant, will suppose that God, who is a spirit, has actually such bodily organs as these. The eyes of the Lord are his understanding, his hand or arm, denotes his power: And, in like manner, he is said to repent, when he alters his treatment of creatures from what it had been, or seemed about to be. When he destroys what he had created, or spares those whom he had threatened to destroy. In these cases, however, the alteration is in them, and not at all in him: and all these variations in his ways, he foresaw, and fully determined, from all eternity. But,

2. Some may reject this doctrine, and others misimprove it, as though the inevitable consequence of it were, that all supplications and intercessions to God, can avail nothing. If he will do just as he sees fit after all, and just as he had eternally foreordained—if he be so in one mind that nothing can turn him, it may be said, Why should we call upon him? "and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?"

To this it may be answered,

1. That whatever difficulty there may be in reconciling the efficacy of prayer, with the immutabil

ity of God, yet both must be believed, if we believe the scriptures: and we must impute the seeming inconsistency between them, to their being matters too high for our comprehension. That with God there is no shadow of turning, we are expressly assured in his word, and must necessarily conclude from his other perfections. But we are also abundantly taught that he heareth prayer, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. It is written, "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." It is written, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain." It is written, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." And our great Teacher hath told us; "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

There are also many examples of the wonderful efficacy of prayer, recorded in the holy scriptures, for our encouragement to this duty. We have the instance of Jacob's wrestling in prayer until the breaking of the day; to whom it was said, "Thy name shall be called Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God, and hast prevailed." We have repeated instances of the prevalence of the fervent intercession of Moses, for averting the threatened vengeance of God, and the utter destruction of his people in the wilderness. We have the instance of the Ninevites: when Jonah, by express divine command, had made a solemn public proclamation; "Yet forty days, and Ninevah shall be overthrown:" Nevertheless, on their fasting, and crying mightily unto God, we are told, "God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them; and he did it not."

From these declarations and examples, it is certain, if the Bible be true, that prayer is not a vain thing; however hard it may be to conceive how it can be of any avail, if God changeth not, and is not to be turned.

2. It may be observed, that there is no more difficulty in this, than there is in reconciling God's decrees, or even his fore-knowledge, of whatsoever comes to pass, with its being of the least avail to use any means for the preservation of our lives, for the recovery of bodily health, or for procuring our daily bread. But,

3. In every case, the true solution is, that God hath decreed the means, as well as the end: or that, though he hath determined whatever he will do, and never alters his mind, yet he hath determined to do things in a certain way, and in no other. Some things indeed, God determined from eternity, to bring to pass without means; and these he thus brings to pass. But concerning those events which he determined to effect by the use of means, it is not true that they would come to pass at all, if the appointed means were not used. What God hath thus joined together, cannot be put asunder. To suppose that things which he designed to do by certain means, he afterwards should accomplish without the use of those means, is to suppose him mutable. It is to suppose an alteration in the Divine Mind. If God be unchangeable, he will do every thing in the very way he hath purposed, and in no other way.

Respecting prayer, in particular, the subject now under consideration; some mercies, God, from eternity, determined to bestow without being sought unto for them: for instance, giving men capacities and a disposition to seek and serve him. In regard to these, he is found of them that sought him not; and hath mercy on whom he will have mercy. But there are other blessings, which though he hath determined to grant, yet he hath as absolutely determined to be sought unto for them first; and to bestow them only in answer to prayer. This is the case with respect to the pardon of transgressors, and giving

them a covenant title to eternal life. And this is the case respecting many temporal deliverances and salvations. When God hath determined to deliver a sinful people from threatened judgments, he will deliver them; but he will yet, for all this, be inquired of to do it for them. He will first cause them to repent, and accept the punishment of their iniquities. He will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh—a feeling, sensible heart; a heart to mourn for their sins with godly sorrow, and to seek unto him, in a humble, penitent manner. And in this way only, will he restore them to his favor, plant them, and cause them to flourish. But when he hath determined to destroy a guilty nation, though Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, and interceded night and day for it, their intercessions could be of no avail. Some favors God will confer upon persons at the request of others merely; other things he will not bestow on any until they seek to him themselves. Some blessings may always be obtained, if we ask aright for them; as pardoning mercy, justifying grace, and progressive sanctification: in other cases God will sometimes grant the particular requests of his children; and sometimes will refuse them in mercy. But all these diversities of operation, and the real efficacy of the prayer of faith, are fully reconcilable with the eternal unchangeableness of His purpose, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

I shall now conclude with a few reflections, arising from what has been said upon this subject.

1. We may hence see that the immutability of God is a glorious attribute. That His being so in one mind that none can turn him, instead of affording any cause of complaint or uneasiness, is matter of the highest joy and rejoicing. We have seen that this is necessarily the consequence of his infin-

ite wisdom, power and goodness; and that it is not inconsistent with his hearing prayer, or being easy to be entreated: and it is evidently necessary to be believed, as the ground of trust and confidence in him. Could he be persuaded to alter his eternal plan, or any part of it, by our arguments or entreaties, not his wisdom and power, but the weakness and folly of partial, ignorant creatures, would govern the world. In one whose understanding can never err, and who is always disposed to do what is best, immoveable fixedness in his own opinion and intention, is certainly to be rejoiced in and adored. Hence Moses says, "Because I will publish the name of the Lord, ascribe ye greatness to our God: He is the Rock, his work is perfect—just and right is he." David also says, "Who is a God, save the Lord? or who is a *rock* save our God." And again, "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed, but thou art the *same*."

2. We may learn from this subject, the unreasonableness and danger of that power for which some contend, as essential to the freedom of a moral agent: —a power to will and act this way or that, in all cases; contrary to one's own disposition, as well as according to it. The Almighty himself has not this power: if he had, what Rock—what immoveable basis—what firm foundation would there be in the universe, on which the mind of a good man could be stayed, and kept in perfect peace! The want of such a power as this, is implied in that immutability of the Supreme Being, which is essential to be believed, as the ground of all trust and confidence in him. Were it possible for God to lie, or to act unwisely, unjustly, or unmercifully; or were it

possible for him to change his own nature; or to will and do, in all cases, contrary to his own mind, he could not be relied upon, any more than the changing wind, or the fluctuating ocean. And must man have more power than God Almighty, or else he cannot be a free agent! Nothing can be more palpably absurd, than to think it a desirable power, and a great privilege, to be able to will and act without all motive or reason, and contrary to one's own inclination.

3. What has been said may be of service for the correction of some errors, which are probably common, respecting the design and usefulness of prayer. The end of our being required to offer up supplications and intercessions to God, cannot be to inform him of our wants, or to move his pity, or to make any alteration in his purposes. We are not to conceive of Him, as being altogether like ourselves, or our fellow-men. In petitioning to earthly rulers for justice, or to the rich for mercy, and filling our mouth with arguments, we may hope to convince them of the equitableness of our cause, or to make them acquainted with our necessities, or to move their compassion: but none of these effects can reasonably be expected, from the most melting entreaties, or the most clear and ample representations, to the omniscient, immutable Jehovah—the God of all grace. "He knows what things we have need of before we ask him; his mercy is self-moved, and he is ever in one mind."

But, though informing, moving, or turning *Him*, ought not to be thought of as the end of prayer to God; yet there are purposes to be answered by it, which render it our reasonable service. It is designed to alter us; to make us more sensible of our dependance and so prepare us for mercies; and also to give glory to the Father of lights, as the giver of every good and perfect gift. This last end, at least,

may be subserved by intercessions for others, as well as by supplications for ourselves. And for all these reasons, prayer is not a vain thing: it is our life; and by this shall we escape eternal death. "For," says the apostle, "the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him: for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

4. From this subject it may be seen, that it is our highest wisdom, as well as most indispensible duty, in our wills, desires and prayers, to be resigned to the unalterable will, and the unerring counsel of the only wise God. He certainly knows, and we know not, what is best. His designs are always right, and universally good: our wishes are often partial, selfish, and wrong. Had we our requests in all cases, leanness might be sent into our souls; it might be ruinous to ourselves, as well as hurtful to the universe. Unreserved submission, certainly becomes all creatures, to infinite wisdom. We should pray for what appears desirable to us, provided only it seem good in the sight of God. Indeed, in regard to things expressly revealed to be the Divine will, there is no room for such a proviso or submission. In our desires and prayers for saving grace—for personal holiness, and heavenly happiness, we need not express a willingness to be denied, if it be the will of God; because we know it is not. We know that they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, shall be filled: and that to the poor in spirit, it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom of heaven. When, therefore, we have this spirit, and sincerely desire these blessings, we may ask for them without reserve.

But in regard to temporal comforts, or being saved from temporal evils—in regard to all things about which the purpose of God is not revealed, submission to his unknown will ever become us. This is what reason dictates; and this is what scripture

constantly inculcates. Many are the precepts enjoining this, and many the examples by which it is enforced. Not to multiply texts, on a point so abundantly taught, and so self-evident, I will only observe, that our Saviour directed his disciples, before they petitioned for daily bread, to pray that the will of God might be done. And that, when he himself was in the bitterest agony, and prayed most earnestly for relief, yet he was all resignation. "Father," says he, "if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Let us bear in remembrance this spirit of our suffering Saviour; and may the same mind be in us, which was in Him. AMEN.

SERMON VI.

ON THE ALL-GOVERNING PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

ISAIAH XLV. 7.

I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things.

WE are apt to be forgetful of our entire dependance upon God, and not to have a proper sense of the operation of his hand, either in the good things we enjoy, or in the evils we suffer. In the day of prosperity we rejoice; but are not often duly thankful to the great Author of all our blessings. In the day of adversity we are grieved; but seldom consider, as we ought, that the calamities which have befallen us are frowns of heaven. The best, need frequently to be reminded of these things; though they know them, and are well established in the truth of them.

But I have something further in view at present, than merely stirring up your minds by way of remembrance. It is difficult to know what ought to be believed concerning the divine agency, in many things that are done and suffered under the sun. There may be danger of erring on either hand: of ascribing to the holy Governor of the universe what would be a dishonorable imputation; as well as of

not giving him the glory which is indeed due to his name, as the Creator and Lord of all.

"Whence comes *evil?*" is a question which has exceedingly puzzled wise men, in former ages of the world. That a being of perfect holiness, should be the author of sin; or that a being of infinite goodness should be the original introducer of misery, seems absurd to suppose. And yet, that any thing should come into existence, without an uncreated first cause, appears equally impossible.

From this dilemma, some of the ancient philosophers, who had only the light of nature, were led to believe that there must be two eternal beings, of equal power, and of directly opposite dispositions: One the author of all good; the other the author of all evil. Had they attended more fully to the matter, they might have seen, one would think, that the hypothesis of two necessarily existent, uncontrolable, contending beings, was as great an absurdity as any which it could be invented to avoid.

But, whatever might have been discovered by mere human reason, this, certainly, is a supposition which revelation utterly rejects. The God of the Bible is One, who alone inhabiteth eternity. The blessed and only Potentate—whose hand none can stay—whose counsel shall stand—who doeth, in heaven and earth, and in all deep places, whatsoever He pleaseth. This glory is often given him by inspired holy men; and this he claims to himself in many places of scripture, and very emphatically in the words chosen for our present subject.

These words are part of a prophecy concerning the great conqueror of the Assyrian empire, and deliverer of Israel out of captivity in Babylon; addressed to him by name, two hundred years before he was born. See ver. 1, of this chapter: "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him." And from ver. 4th to the text. "For Jacob my

servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me; that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides me: I am the Lord, and there is none else. *I form the light,*" &c.

For the illustration of this text, I shall endeavor to show.

I. What the things are in their proper extent, of which God here claims to be, in some sense, the author, or cause. And,

II. How it is to be understood, that He *forms*, *creates*, *makes*, and *does*, all these things.

By light and darkness, peace and evil, must be here meant, I conceive, whatsoever comes to pass.

The word light, literally taken, signifies that medium by which material objects are seen with our bodily eyes: and darkness, in the literal sense, is the want of this light. But, as light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing, for the eyes to behold the sun; and as darkness is uncomfortable, and many ways disadvantageous to us; so, these terms are frequently made use of to express joy and sorrow, happiness and misery, of any kind. See Psal. xcvii. 11, "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Psal. cxii. 4, "Unto the upright, there ariseth light in the darkness." And Lam. iii. 1, 2, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath: He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light." Nothing is more common than this metaphorical use of the words light and darkness; meaning by them comfort and trouble, prosperity and adversity.

By these expressions are likewise frequently meant, moral good and evil; holiness and sin. So the first is used in Matt. v. 16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." And the last, Eph. v. 11, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." And both together, in 1 John i. 5, 6, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."

It appears, then, that whatever is either calamitous or sinful, is expressed in scripture by darkness; and that all kinds of good, are signified by the word light.

Peace, is also an expression of very extensive import. Taken in every view of it, external and internal, it comprehends almost every thing that is desirable. Our Saviour expresses the whole legacy he willed to his disciples, by this one word. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." And evil, you are sensible, is one of the most common words, for both sin and misery.

Nor is there any thing in our text, or in the context, to limit the meaning of these very universal terms. On the contrary, the words light and darkness, peace and evil, are plainly here used in their most unrestrained signification. It is the evident design of this whole passage to set forth, in the most forcible manner, that all the circumstances and actions of men, are subject to the providential ordering and direction of God.

Nor is this the only passage where such a doctrine is taught. It is said, Prov. xvi. 33, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. Rom. xi. 34, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." And Eph. i. 11—"Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

That God is the author of all good, will not be disputed by any, except an atheist: and that all evils also, are of his ordering, or are some way sent by him, we are plainly taught. It is asked, Amos iii. 6, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" There are all sorts of evils in cities, moral as well as natural; and yet this question implies a strong assertion, that there can be no kind of evil in any city, but what is ordered of God. Or, should it be supposed that natural evil only is there meant; yet it is obvious to observe, that natural and moral evils are inseparably blended and connected, in many, if not all cases. A great part of the calamities in cities, and in all other places, are immediately occasioned by the iniquities committed in them: and undoubtedly it holds true, without any exception, that unholiness is the cause of all unhappiness. It is impossible, therefore, that God should bring upon us all the evils of suffering, in the manner they are brought upon us, without his providentially ordering the evils of sin.

Nor, indeed, can it be believed that God is the author of all good, unless we suppose him the designing cause of moral evil: for great good is occasioned by moral evil, in a multitude of instances. And it is observable that wicked agents, and the worst of actions, are often spoken of in scripture, as the instruments and means made use of in Providence, for accomplishing the most important and benevolent designs. Thus when Joseph's brethren, moved with envy, had sold him to be carried as a slave into Egypt, he tells them, "Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." And God calls Nebuchadnezzar the rod of his anger; and says, "I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, for to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart

think so." Another instance, and the most astonishing one, of God's designing evil actions for good ends, we have in the crucifixion of our Saviour. Peter says to the Jews, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Thus it is evident, that by light and darkness, peace and evil, we are to understand, every thing that takes place, in the natural and moral world: and that this text, thus understood, asserts no more than the common doctrine of scripture.

Respecting the manner in which the divine agency is concerned, in all actions and events, there may be danger, nevertheless, of entertaining erroneous ideas. It was proposed, therefore, to inquire,

II. How we are to understand, that God *forms*, *creates*, *makes*, and *does*, all these things.

Certainly, it is not to be understood, in a literal or strict sense, that He *does*, all that is done. "Far be it from God," says Elihu, "that he should do wickedness: and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity." Doing wickedness, and committing iniquity, are synonymous phrases: but to impute to the Most High, any thing like what is commonly meant by either of these phrases, is evident blasphemy.

Nor are we to imagine, certainly, that God *makes* his creatures do, whatever is done by them, in any such manner as is inconsistent with their own proper agency. Rational creatures certainly act; and act as freely, as if there were no being above them to direct their steps, or to govern their actions. When God works in men, to will and to do that which is good; they, nevertheless will and do it themselves; and are really praiseworthy. And he does not, surely, so influence any to evil, as to render them unactive, involuntary, or undeserving of blame.

Nor do I believe it is meant in our text, or is true, literally and strictly speaking, that God *creates*, whatsoever comes to pass: particularly darkness, and moral evil.

But this must not be taken for granted, nor hastily passed over: because, however indisputable, it is disputed. There are some among us, and some who are deservedly in reputation for wisdom, and general soundness in the faith; who appear to be of opinion, that God is the direct Author—the immediate Cause—the proper Creator, of all evil, as well as of all good—of all sin, as well as holiness, in heart and life—in thought, word, and deed.

This opinion, however, notwithstanding my high esteem and particular friendship for some of the holders of it, I am not yet ready to adopt, for several reasons.

1. To suppose that the actions of men, whether virtuous or vicious, are *created*, seems to confound all distinction between creation and Providence; or rather, wholly to exclude the latter.

The work of creation, we used to think, was God's making creatures and things, at first; or giving the beginning of existence to matter and minds, with their various properties, instincts and organizations. And that God's works of Providence, were his preserving things already made, and governing all their operations. But according to this new philosophy, creation is all; Providence is nothing. For what preserving and governing of creatures or actions can there be, when every creature and every action, is every moment created anew? An action, a thought, or volition, whether good or evil, is a new and strange kind of creature, or created thing. But, in a theological view, the question before us is of chief importance, as it respects moral evil. I add, therefore;

2. It appears to me, that to suppose God the Creator of sin, whether in principle or action, is hardly

reconcilable with his perfect holiness. "Doth a fountain send forth, at the same place, sweet waters and bitter?" Can darkness proceed from Him, as its proper source, in whom there is no darkness at all?

It is true, God has created many things which are of a *different* nature from himself; as the bodies of men and beasts, and all parts of the world of matter: but nothing, I conceive, directly *opposite* to his own nature; as is sin. The sun is the immediate cause of the growth of vegetables; though these are essentially different from the sun itself: but it is not thus the cause of ice and darkness; which are no more of a contrary nature to it, than sin is to the nature of God.*

* There is a vast difference between the sun's being the cause of the lightsomeness and warmth of the atmosphere, and of the brightness of gold and diamonds, by its presence and positive influence; and its being the occasion of darkness and frost in the night, by its motion whereby it descends below the horizon. The motion of the sun is the occasion of the latter kind of events; but not the proper cause, efficient, or producer of them.—No more is any action of the divine Being, the cause of the evil of men's wills. If the sun were the proper *cause* of cold and darkness, it would be the fountain of these things, as it is the fountain of light and heat: and then something might be argued from the nature of cold and darkness, to a likeness of nature in the sun; and it might be justly infered that the sun itself is dark and cold: but from its being the cause of these, no otherwise than by its absence, no such thing can be infered, but the contrary. It may justly be argued that the sun is a bright and hot body, if cold and darkness are found to be the consequence of its withdrawment; and the more constantly and necessarily these effects are connected with and confined to its absence, the more strongly does it argue the sun to be the fountain of light and heat. So, in as much as sin is not the fruit of any positive influence of the Most High, but on the contrary, arises from the withdrawment of his action and energy, and under certain circumstances, necessarily follows on the want of his influence, this is no argument that he is sinful, or his operation evil; but on the contrary, that he and his agency are altogether holy, and that he is the fountain of all holiness. It would be strange arguing indeed, because men never commit sin, but only when God leaves them to them-

I am sensible it has been said, there is no more inconsistency with the holiness of God, in supposing him the efficient, immediate cause of sin, for necessary good purposes; than in supposing he only permits it, for wise ends, and so orders things that he knows it will be committed.

But these two ways of accounting for the existence of moral evil, appear to me materially different. There are supposable cases in which it would be right for a *man*, not to hinder another from sinning, when he could hinder him; and also to place him in circumstances of temptation, expecting that he would sin. For instance, a parent may leave money in the way of a child suspected of being given to theft; and may conceal himself and let the child steal it; with a view to correct him, in order to reclaim him, or as a warning to his other children. All this might be perfectly right in the parent; however certainly he might know, that the child would be guilty of the expected crime. But I question whether any case can be supposed in which it would not be wrong, directly to influence another to do evil, that good might come. Exciting one to sin by power or persuasion; and placing one in circumstances of trial, wherein he would be tempted to sin, without restraining him from it, are surely different things, although the certainty of his sinning may be the same.

3. I dare not think that God creates sin, and all kinds of evil, because this seems plainly contrary to the general current of the holy scriptures.

selves; and necessarily sin when he does so, that therefore their sin is not from themselves, but from God: as strange as it would be to argue, because it is always dark when the sun is gone, and never dark when he is present, that therefore darkness is from the sun, and that his disk and beams must be black." *Edwards on the Will.*

Page 259. *Boston, Ed.* 1754.

In the first chapter of Genesis, it is said, "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." Of his making two great lights, we are told; and that he made the stars also: but no account is there given of his creating darkness. Respecting our own species, the inspired historian particularly informs us, that "God created man in his own image: in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them." Nor do we find in that book, or in all the Bible, that he hath since ever created them otherwise. Solomon three thousand years after the fall, having made diligent search among men and women, to find out their true character, and the cause of their so universal depravity, says; "Lo, this only have I found, that *God* made man upright; but *they* have sought out many inventions." Wicked practices, and deceitful inventions to conceal their criminality, are ever ascribed in scripture to mankind themselves, or to other fallen creatures, and never to God, as their efficient cause.

In the New-Testament, christians are said to be "created unto good works:" and we read of "the new man, which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." But no where do we read of any one that was created unto *evil* works; or after *Satan* in unrighteousness and sin. It is written, 1 Cor. xiv. 33, "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." And James i. 13—17, "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted when he is led away of his own lust and enticed.—Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Can any thing be more express to teach us, that a distinction ought carefully to be made between the origin of good and evil; and that we should not conceive them both alike to come from God?

For scripture proof that God is not the efficient author of sin, I will only add, that the fruits of the Spirit, and works of the flesh, are set in contrast and spoken of as diametrical opposites: whereas, did God create sinful propensities in men, or directly influence them to evil actions, the works of the flesh would be as real and immediate fruits of the divine Spirit, as the holiest exercises of the best saints.

4. I see no occasion for the supposition of God's being thus the author of all evil: nor any good ends that it can answer.

Could it be seen *how* evils might be accounted for, *without supposing* them any part of the creation of God; and how God might have an absolute dominion over all events, without being the immediate cause of bad things; no good man, I conclude would wish to conceive of Him as being thus the proper source of darkness and evil. And indeed, were it so, that our weak minds were unable to comprehend how God can work all things after the counsel of his own will, or how natural and moral evil could ever have been, without believing that God is as much, and as immediately, the cause of evil as of good; yet it might be more modest, and more wise, to leave these among other incomprehensibles, than to have recourse to so bold an hypothesis for the solution of them. But, I apprehend, there is no need of this hypothesis in order to account for the existence of evil, or in order to an understanding belief of the universal government of the Most High.

Evils, of most if not all kinds, are such negative things—such mere defects, in their origin at least, as do not need creation, or require a positive omnipotent cause. This is the case, evidently, with respect to natural darkness: it is only the want of light. This is the case, also, with respect to natural death: it is only the cessation, the loss, the want of life. And this may be the case, with respect to spiritual

darkness, and spiritual death. It has heretofore been the orthodox opinion, that all moral evil consists radically in privation; or, that unholiness, at bottom, is the mere want of holiness. And, notwithstanding all the floods of light, from various quarters, which have come into the world in this age of new discoveries, possibly this one old opinion may yet be true. "God made man *upright*." That is, He formed him with a disposition impartially just and good: He created in him a principle of universal righteousness. When man fell, by eating the forbidden fruit, this principle had not been preserved in perfect strength and exercise. In consequence of that disobedience, the divine internal influence was so withdrawn, that this principle was entirely lost. But we are not told, nor need it be supposed, that any opposite principle was then created in him. Our first parents had, I believe, in their original formation, all the radical instincts of nature which they had after the fall; or which any of their posterity now have. Such as a principle of self-preservation, a desire of self-promotion, and a propensity to increase and multiply; together with all the more particular appetites and passions, subservient to these purposes. All these are innocent in themselves, though not in themselves virtuous. But these private instincts, when left to operate alone, without the governing influence of a public spirit, or a just regard for other beings, will naturally lead to all manner of iniquity, in heart and life. To avarice and ambition; to envy and malice; to intemperance and lewdness; to frauds and oppressions; to wars and fightings.

There is no need of supposing any other divine agency, than only to uphold in existence creatures that have lost their virtue, amidst surrounding temptations, in order to account for all the evil affections which we ever feel, and for all the external wickedness that is ever committed. Nor, in order to the holiest creatures losing their virtue, need any thing

more be supposed on God's part, than only his leaving them to themselves; or not upholding in them, and constantly invigorating, a virtuous disposition.

And as, in this way, we can account for the existence of all manner of evil; so we can thus understand how it is possible for God to bring about whatsoever comes to pass, without his being the actor, or maker, or instigator, of any thing that is not perfectly good. When He does not cause light, there will be darkness. When He does not make peace, there will be evil. The darkness takes place according to his appointment, with the same exactness and certainty, as if He actually created it; and so does evil of every kind. What He determines to permit, knowing perfectly the circumstances and dispositions of every agent concerned, will as infallibly come to pass, as what he determines to do himself, or to effect by his own positive influence. The king's heart, and the rivers of water; the waves of the sea, and the tumults of the people, are in the hand of the Lord, to all important intents and purposes, if it be only true that He restrains them, or lets them run; stilleth them, or suffereth them to rage, just as he sees fit.

In this sense, I conceive, it is to be understood, that God forms the light, and creates darkness; makes peace, and creates evil. He has the absolute government—the perfect control—the entire superintendency, of all these things.

We have now only to consider, what is the proper improvement of this doctrine. And,

1. According to the foregoing statement of it, we ought not to improve it for the excusing of any iniquity or imprudence, in ourselves or others.

When any folly has been committed or any mischief has been done, some are ready to say, *It was so ordered;* as if therefore nobody was to be blamed.

But this is a false inference, from just premises. True, it was so ordered of God; and ordered righteously and wisely: but it was so ordered by the doer of the mischief also; and ordered carelessly, perhaps, or wickedly. You will say, It must have been so, and the actor could not have done otherwise: but, I say, he might have done otherwise, if he would. It is true, there is a kind of necessity in the actions of men. They necessarily act according to their own choice; and they necessarily choose to act according to their own disposition. Under this kind of necessity God himself acts. It is impossible for him to do, because it is impossible for him to will, that which is contrary to his own nature. He necessarily wills and does, what is agreeable to his moral perfections. But such a necessity as this, is so far from being inconsistent with freedom, that it is essential to all free agency. Actions which can and do take place, contrary to the inclination of the agent, are not *his* actions. He has no command over them; and therefore can deserve no praise or blame for them.

The necessity of acting according to our own minds, is all the necessity which need be supposed, when we suppose that all our actions were decreed, and are ordered of God. A creature that acts according to any laws of nature, and not at perfect random, without any self-government, acts in such a manner that He who knows what is in him, may fore-know all his actions; and in such a manner that He in whose hand his times are, may govern all his volitions. Men follow their several courses, as freely as the rivers of water, and with a higher kind of freedom; yet, since they run agreeably to their own inclination, and cannot do otherwise, a Being omniscient and omnipotent, can calculate before hand all their motions; can keep them in the channels decreed for them, and can turn them whithersoever he will. If any do not comprehend this, yet let them

not think they so fully comprehend the contrary, as to feel certain, that either man cannot be free, or God cannot govern the world. Certainly the providential government of God, over the hearts and ways of men, though most absolute, is not such but that, if they do well, they are praise-worthy; and if they do not well, the sin lieth at their own door.

Neither let it be imagined that the criminality of a bad action is taken away, or at all extenuated, because it will be over-ruled for good. Actions are good or evil, according to the nature of them, and the intention of the agent, and not according to undesigned consequences. When we act wickedly, and with a wicked mind, its being productive of happy effects, alters nothing in regard to our blame-worthiness. In the divine decrees, and in the divine providence, "Whatever is, is right:" but in the conduct of creatures, many things that are, are not at all the less wrong. God's governing all things, so as to make them subserve his wise and holy designs, should not lead us to think any more favorably of our own, or of our neighbor's, foolish and sinful actions. Yet,

2. The belief that God orders all events, should teach us patience and entire submission, whatever evils may befal us, and by whatever means they may be brought upon us. For this, we have the example of David, on a most trying occasion. When Shimei came out and cursed him most bitterly, as he was fleeing from his rebellious son Absalom; and Abishai said to him, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." David meekly replied, "Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." However we may do well to be angry at the wicked instruments of what we suffer; yet to God, who orders it in righteousness, unmurmuring resignation ever becomes us.

3. This doctrine may well afford strong consolation to believers, in the darkest and most perilous times. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul," says the Psalmist, "and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God." And again, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice: let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof."

Good men delight in the doctrines of God's unalterable decrees, and all-governing Providence; not because they think these doctrines imply Pagan fatalism, or at all exculpate human misconduct; but because in these alone, can they find solid ground of rest for their souls, in regard to their own safety, or the safety of the universe. Let the self-determining wills of fallen, or of mutable creatures, be supposed to act independently and uncontrolably, they see no certainty that present gloomy and distressing scenes, will ever have a happy termination; or that things may not always proceed from bad to worse. They see no prospect of any thing but anarchy and contingence, to all eternity. But let them be told, and firmly believe, that a Being of infinite goodness and unerring wisdom, steadily guides and powerfully governs the whole creation—That not a sparrow falls to the ground, nor a single hair of any one's head can perish, without the permission and ordering of their heavenly Father—That there are immutable, divine decrees, over which, neither the swelling ocean, nor the madness of the people; neither the pride of kings, nor the power of devils, can possibly ever pass—Let all this be fully confirmed to them, and the hearts of the righteous are at rest. Thus stayed on God, they are kept in perfect peace. Hence it is written, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings—that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"

4. From this doctrine it may be seen, whom we ought to fear, as well as of what we have no reason

to be afraid. "Hear now this," says Jeremiah, "O foolish people, and without understanding, which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me, saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail: though they roar, yet can they not pass over it."

What madness is in the heart of the sons of men! They will tremble at the sound of a shaken leaf, and are afraid of their own shadow, while of God Almighty they have no fear! They profane his holy name, trample under foot his sacred laws, and slight the gospel of his grace, without apprehension of any danger!

But such hardened, graceless sinners, are not the only persons that fall under reproof in this particular. Sincere christians are often driven into sin, or detered from duty, by that fear of man which bringeth a snare; while they have not a due fear of God before their eyes. Let such pay a more suitable regard to the needful admonition of our Saviour, Luke xii. 4, 5, "I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; Yea, I say unto you, Fear him."

SERMON VII.

CHARITY, THE ESSENCE OF MORAL VIRTUE.

1 TIMOTHY I. 5.

Now, the end of the commandment is charity.

NEXT to what man is to believe concerning God, what duty God requires of man, is necessary to be understood. In this chapter, the apostle tells of some at that time, who desired to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they said, nor whereof they affirmed. And it may be the case with some at all times, who think themselves capable of preaching the gospel, that they are ignorant of the spirit and end of the moral law—the eternal rule and standard of right. This is the case, not only when the law is supposed to be still a covenant of works, by the personal obedience of which a sinner may be justified; but also when it is conceived of and inculcated as a rule of life, in a loose, vague, and superficial manner.

In order to speak correctly, or think accurately, on any subject or branch of science, the first principles of it must be rightly understood, and well ascertained. As in architecture, so in divinity and morals, it is necessary to begin at the foundation. By reducing all virtue and duty to a focal point, or radical princi-

ple, and by keeping that in view in all our investigations, we shall have the advantage, in some measure, of the single eye, which causeth the whole body to be full of light. Whereas, if we have erroneous or indeterminate ideas of the essence of all morality and religion, our judgment concerning ourselves, and all our discourses on moral and religious subjects, will necessarily be full of darkness.

The whole moral law, as given to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, written by the finger of God on tables of stone, was contained in ten commandments. These are reduced by our Saviour to two; on which, he tells us, "hang all the law and the prophets." The apostle Paul, in several of his epistles, has given us a briefer summary still. He says, Rom. xiii. 10, "Love is the fulfilling of the law:" and Gal. v. 14, "All the law is fulfilled in one word; even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." He is indeed there speaking of the second table of the ten commandments; but in our text he appears to have reference to the law at large, without limitation to social duties: and yet here, likewise, he expresses the sum and substance, the whole scope and design of it, in a single word: "The *end* of the commandment is *charity*."

It is now proposed to inquire and show, what we are here to understand by charity; and how this is the end of the commandment.

I. What the apostle means by charity, I shall endeavor particularly to explain.

This is a word in very common use; but that it is commonly understood in the fulness of its original signification, is not thence certain. We learn from our Saviour's sermon on the mount, that the law given by Moses, had been very much explained away by former expositors; and so it may not

improbably now be, respecting the words of the New-Testament.

By charity, we often understand, nothing more than external liberality to such as are in want and distress. One who feeds the hungry and clothes the naked, is called a charitable man. And indeed, doing such deeds of kindness, as we have ability and opportunity, is one necessary expression of gospel charity. This is essential to pure and undefiled religion. "Whoso hath this world's goods," says the apostle John, "and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Job 'was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; he delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him: the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him, and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.' Nevertheless, a man may abound in such outward deeds of charity, while yet he is *wholly* destitute of this virtue. So the apostle Paul evidently supposes. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor," says he, "and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." And our Saviour speaks of hypocrites, who gave alms that they might be admired of men, which, he intimates, would be all their reward.

Again; by charity we sometimes mean, a readiness to think well of our neighbors, and of men of different religious opinions. Those who believe that mankind are naturally virtuous, and that men may be in a safe condition respecting another world, let their religious principles be what they will; consider themselves, and are considered by one another, as men of eminent and extensive charity. It is possible, however, they may have little or nothing of that charity which is the end of the commandment. An aptness to entertain a favorable opinion of others, may indeed be owing to an honest and good heart. It may proceed from a truly generous disposition.

"Charity thinketh no evil; hopeth all things, believeth all things." It is not the part of christian charity, to be jealous or censorious; but to hope and believe the best, of men of all sects and denominations. In matters of religion, it must be confessed, there is often seen much of that narrowness and bitterness of party spirit, which ought to be condemned. And certainly those christians who are quick-sighted to discern every mote in a brother's eye, while a beam in their own is undiscovered, are justly chargeable with great want of charity.

But then, on the other hand, it can hardly be disputed, that liberality of sentiments, as it is called, may be carried too far; and may, in many instances, proceed from no good cause.

As to a readiness to believe human nature very good; there may be nothing any more generous in this, than there is in thinking of ourselves, of our own family, our own country, and other connections, more highly than we ought to think. National prejudice is notorious: and is easily accounted for from self-love. So is prejudice in favor of every less society, of which we ourselves are members. And from the same narrow source, it may well be supposed, we have all of us a strong, partial bias in favor of our own species. Hence it is often seen that the fondest admirers of mankind in the gross, when they come to speak of separate individuals, will as readily express a bad opinion of them, as those who believe the total depravity of all men by nature. Self, is then out of the question; or, perhaps, is in the opposite scale. Hence, one may say all manner of evil of other countries, or of persons opposed to us, unconnected with us, and no offence is taken: but say a word against our own country, or against all mankind, and our wrath is soon enkindled. "Master, thus saying, thou reproachest *us* also."

As to being apt to think that all men, Pagans, Mahometans, Papists, Socinians, Arians, Arminians,

and even Trinitarians and Calvinists, are essentially right in religious matters; this may be owing to loose notions, to cursory, superficial thinking, or to extreme carelessness and indifference, about all religion. Nor is it to be wondered at, that some are ready to believe all men will be saved; since, perhaps, on no other ground, can they have any comfortable hope concerning themselves.

It is certain, however, that the author and finisher of our faith, was far from being eminent for this kind of charity. His doctrine was, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it." He testified of the world, that the works thereof were evil; and therefore the world hated him. Though he came into the world, not finally to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved: and though he went about doing good; feeding thousands, restoring sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, and healing all manner of diseases; yet he was thought, no doubt, exceedingly uncharitable. And so, I believe, would any preacher now be thought, who should teach the laws of God, and give the character of man, with the same truth and freedom that he did. We read of a people of old, that "said to the seers, See not: and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things; speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." And we read of teachers in those times, who daubed liberally with untempered mortar. Who were so charitable and tender-hearted, as to heal the hurt of sinners slightly; "saying, Peace, peace, when there was no peace." Certainly, thinking that the most of mankind, and all men by nature, are very virtuous and good; and telling them that the broad way, will never lead to destruction; is not the charity of the law of God, or the gospel of Christ.

The Greek word for charity, in the New-Testament, is often translated, and always properly signifies *love*—a love of *benevolence*. It is the same that is

rendered love in Rom. v. 8, "God commendeth his *love* toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In Rom. xiii. 10, "*Love* worketh no ill to his neighbor." And in 1 John iv. 8, "God is *love*." And that love—this kind of love, is meant, where our translators have given the word charity, is evident from what is said of it in many places. See particularly, 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7, "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own," &c. All these, any one may easily see, are the natural fruits, and proper characteristics, of a benevolent dispositon.

But it is not enough to show what charity is not, or what are no certain evidences of it; nor to say, in a word, what it is: that it is benevolence; good will; kind affection. Because all men wish well, and are disposed to do good, to some of their fellow-creatures, from some principle or other: and there may be many instances of particular friendships, which are not at all of the nature of christian charity. True benevolence, it must therefore be observed, hath these three properties essential to it, whereby it may be distinguished. It is *universal*—it is *impartial*—and it is *disinterested*.

1. That charity which is the bond of perfectness, or the end of the commandment, must be *universal* benevolence. It extends, or is ready to be extended, to all proper objects of good will: that is, to all beings capable of enjoying good, or of suffering evil.

Not that the charitable man actually exercises kind affection, toward every such being in the universe. This is naturally impossible. There are doubtless many beings in the creation, of whose existence we have no knowledge; and towards whom therefore, we can have no particular feelings, either of love or hatred. But when we say, true benevo-

lence is universal, our meaning is, that it implies a *disposition* universally benevolent. The charitable man is of such a temper of mind, that he wishes well to all beings capable of enjoyment or suffering, as far as he knows any thing of them; and would do so, had he particular information of every individual in actual existence. We will begin with the lowest of such beings.

(1.) The various species of inferior animals, are regarded with some kindness, by all who have any true benevolence. Solomon says, "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast." And so he does of any beast, though not *his*. The Psalmist says of God, "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." And to the Most High he says, "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living *thing*." If therefore we have been created after God in true holiness—in universal goodness, we shall be tender-hearted towards the lowest creatures that have animal life. We shall not torture any of them out of mere wantonness; nor shall we destroy them, unless some good end so requires. We shall not starve them, nor work them unmercifully; but shall provide, as far as we conveniently can for their ease and comfort; and shall take pleasure in seeing them partake of that portion of good, which their bountiful Creator hath provided for them, and given them capacities to enjoy. But,

(2.) Towards our fellow-men, in a more especial manner, we shall be kindly affectioned, if we have any thing of that charity which is intended in our text.

All mankind, of every sect, of every condition, and of every character, are proper objects of benevolent affection. A virtuous love of complacency, is more

limited. That is exercised only towards the good. David speaks of the saints in the earth and the excellent, as those in whom was *all* his *delight*. In opposition to this kind of love, he says. "Do not I *hate* them, O Lord, that hate thee?—I *hate* them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies." But in opposition to a love of benevolence, we should hate no man, let him be of ever so hateful a character, or ever so bitter an enemy to God, or to ourselves. Our Saviour hath enjoined upon his disciples to pray for them who hate and persecute them. And the apostle Paul says, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men." He adds, indeed, "especially unto them who are of the household of faith." The better any are, the more are they entitled to our good wishes and kind offices: but if we have any true benevolence of temper, we shall desire the happiness, and be ready in all proper ways to promote the interest, of even the very worst of men: nor shall we confine our friendship to those near to us—those of our kindred or vicinity; but shall regard all mankind as our neighbors and brethren.

(3.) Superior orders of created beings, particularly the holy angels, are proper objects of our benevolent affection. When the foundations of this our world were laid, these morning stars sang together, we are told, and all these elder sons of God shouted for joy. We also read of great joy in the presence of the angels, over one sinner that repenteth. And if we have any thing of the like extensive generosity of spirit, though we cannot minister to them, as they do to us, yet we shall feel interested in their felicity, and rejoice in their joy. Notwithstanding our distance from them, and the little knowledge we have of them, it ought surely to be a pleasing thought to us, that there are multitudes of such exalted intelligences who have never fallen from their original rectitude, and who are confirmed in everlasting holiness and happiness.

Here a question may arise respecting the fallen angels, and wicked men in hell. Are not these an exception, it may be asked, to the absolute universality of the law of kindness? Is it not lawful and right to feel the opposite disposition to that of friendliness, towards creatures so irrecoverably depraved—so confirmed *in* enmity to God and to all that are good, and so fixed in a state of eternal reprobation?

To this, I think, it is the true answer; We ought not to wish for the release and happiness of those abandoned out-casts, when we believe that God, for good reasons, hath determined the contrary. Nevertheless, we ought to be far from feeling any malevolence towards them; or from rejoicing in their wretchedness, as a thing in itself desirable. If the torments of the damned were not thought necessary, for purposes of such importance as to over-balance all the pains which these miserable sinners are doomed to suffer, the benevolent mind must feel an aversion to their sufferings, however justly merited, and be ardently desirous of their salvation. The pleasure which God, and saints, and the holy angels take, in the eternal, righteous punishment of even the devil and his angels, is not from ill-will, or any want of benevolence towards them; but merely from a regard to the great and glorious ends of moral government thereby to be obtained, and to the good of the universe which will thereby be promoted. Just as we may rejoice in the execution of a murderer, while at the same time we feel a tenderness for him; and should be heartily glad to have his life spared, and his freedom restored, if it were consistent with the support of salutary law, and with the public safety. In this view, the infliction of never-ending tribulation and anguish on rebel angels, and on the reprobate part of fallen men, is no exception to the saying of David, "The Lord is good to all:" nor will the joyful alleluias in heaven, when the smoke of their torments in hell shall ascend for ever and ever, be

any argument that the most universal benevolence reigns not above.

We ought to be of a benevolent disposition towards all our fellow-creatures, and to desire the happiness of every individual of them, as far as is for the best—as far as is consistent with the greatest general good. How far that is, we are not competent judges: but we may well leave it to him who alone is able to govern the universe; with implicit confidence that he will order it in infinite wisdom, righteousness and benevolence. But,

(4.) It is of the last importance to observe, that the Supreme Being ought not to be excluded from our hearts, as an improper object of any benevolent regard.

Some have thought it absurd, and quite irreverent, to talk of loving the Most High, with this kind of love. Their reason is, because he is so infinitely above us, and above a possibility of being benefited by us. God is, in the highest possible degree, happy and glorious. There is nothing which the most benevolent mind could wish, in respect to Him, but what he already possesses, and will infallibly for ever possess, in that perfection to which nothing can be added.

But I do not see why this should be thought to render it impossible, or improper, for such poor creatures as we are, to be at all kindly affectioned towards the Deity. To rejoice with them that rejoice, is as real an expression of benevolence, as it is to weep with them that weep: we may feel friendly to those above us, as well as to those upon a level with us, or in an inferior condition; and to such as are independent of us, as well as to them who need our kind offices. Christ says, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." In the latter of those two great commandments of love, on which hang all the law and the prophets, benevolence to our neigh-

bor is undoubtedly intended: and to say that nothing of this kind of love to the Lord our God, is meant in the former of them, appears arbitrary and unreasonable. To say that God is loved by good men only with complacency, and not at all with good will, is contrary to plain scripture. Abraham was called the friend of God: and Moses was friendly to him; as is evident from the anxious concern he discovered for the honor of his great name. And so was David, one would think, from his repeated ardent aspiration, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" and from his calling upon the whole creation, animate and inanimate, to conspire in advancing the divine praise.

All ultimate regard to the glory of God—all sincere concern for the promotion of his cause and kingdom—all grief on account of the offences committed against him, and all godly sorrow for our own sins, are proper exercises of a benevolent disposition towards the Deity: and in these exercises all vital piety most essentially consists.

Though a man cannot be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself: though our goodness extendeth not to Him, in the way of confering favors, as it may to our indigent fellow-creatures; yet we may extend our friendly affections to him, in the ways of rejoicing that he is over all, blessed for ever more, and of being concerned and engaged for the advancement of his declarative glory. And we shall do so, if we have any goodness—any true benevolence—any real religion. It is surely unreasonable to suppose, that the charity so highly spoken of in scripture, as the greatest of the christian graces—the bond of perfectness—the end of the commandment, should be limited to creatures, and have no respect to the great and glorious Creator. More especially since it is to be observed,

2. That true benevolence is *impartial.*

Whenever this principle is in the heart, it will be exercised, not only towards all proper objects; but towards them respectively in some suitable proportion: that is, according to their several characters, capacities, and importance; as far as these are known to us. It is no instance of partiality to regard the life of a man, more than that of a beast; because it is really an object of much greater consequence. Nor, for the same reason, to be more concerned to have the life of an eminently great and useful man preserved, than the life of one very wicked, or very insignificant; who is likely to do much mischief, or little good. In like manner, it is not partiality, but rather what is essential to the impartiality of true benevolence, to regard God, and his glory, more than all the interests of any man, or even of the whole created universe. The reputation of a worthy man, every one will allow, ought to be more highly valued than the life of an inferior animal: but the meanest animal—the least insect—the most despicable reptile, bears a greater proportion to the importance of man; than the most valuable man, or than the highest angel, or than the whole creation, does to God. Compared with him, "the nations are as a drop of a bucket, or the small dust of the balance: they are accounted less than nothing." Accordingly, supreme love to God, is every where in scripture, made the grand characteristic of a good man.

That the charity of the Bible is impartial, as now explained, appears from our Saviour's summary of the law and the prophets. To love my neighbor as myself, supposing an equality between us, is to be quite impartial: and to love God with all our heart and soul, mind and strength, is to come as nearly up to what is due to a being infinitely great and good, as our limited and weak capacities will permit.

I may observe further, that it belongs to the impartiality of true benevolence, to regard the several interests of the same person, or being, in some proportion to their comparative weight or worth. It values, is tender of, and endeavors to preserve and promote, the outward estate, the reputation, the liberties and lives, the good of the bodies and souls of men, proportionably to the apprehended importance of these their respective interests. But,

3. I must not omit to observe, that *disinterestedness*, is another essential property of true benevolence.

It is written, "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself." It is written, "Charity seeketh not her own." It is written, "In the last days perilous times shall come; for men shall be lovers of their own selves."

Selfishness is so universally condemned, and so much is said in the scriptures against self-seeking, that one would think no labored proof were necessary to convince any man who believes the Bible, or any man of common sense, whether he believes the Bible or not, that self-love cannot be the primary source of all true virtue and religion. Yet, however strange, so it is, many great philosophers, and some learned divines, have been professedly of opinion that the best actions of good men, and their most virtuous affections proceed from a mere regard to themselves, as their first principle and last end. They think that a well-regulated self-love, will influence a man to whatsoever things are honest, just, amiable, or of good report: though a misguided self-love, often leads men into the reverse of all these. That as, whenever we transgress the rule of right, it is from a wrong idea of our own interest; so, whenever we conform to that rule, it is only with a view to our own interest, rightly understood. Accordingly they

suppose, as one of their poets hath said, "Self-love, and social, are the same."

And several systems of divinity, widely different in other respects, agree in this, that all religion, at bottom, is nothing but self-love. They go upon the supposition that sinners are converted, either by a mere conviction that it is necessary for their personal safety and happiness to fear God and keep his commandments; or by a persuasion that Christ died for *them*, whence religious affections are excited from a principle of natural gratitude: and that the converted love God, only because they believe he loves them, and designs their salvation.

Now, it is granted, that to live soberly, righteously, and religiously, is both for the temporal and eternal interest of every man. It is granted that men may be influenced to the external duties of morality and religion, by a mere regard to their own safety and happiness. It is also granted that a sort of social, and of religious affections, may arise altogether from an apprehension of the friendship of men, or of the kindness and love of God. It is granted, moreover, that ingratitude is an evidence of extreme depravity: that we are under greater obligation to love a kind friend, than an unmerciful enemy; and that good men love God with more fervency of affection, because he hears their supplications and loads them daily with his benefits; and because he hath given his dear Son to redeem their souls from destruction.

But, notwithstanding all these things are true, it doth not thence follow, nor can it be admitted, that those actions or affections which proceed wholly from self-love, in any of these ways, are at all of the nature of real religion, or of true social virtue.

For scripture proof of the contrary, in addition to the passages refered to already, two or three texts may be sufficient. The first I shall adduce is in the book of Job; see chap. i. 8—12 verse. "The

Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is greatly increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power."

We here find, not only that the malicious and subtile accuser, takes it for granted on all hands, that a mere mercenary religion was really no religion at all; but we see the Most High himself, implicitly concedes, in the plainest manner, that if what Satan had insinuated were true, Job's character as an upright man, must be given up. For in answering this allegation of the adversary, the matter of fact only is disputed, and permission is given to put that matter to the severest trial.

The next passage which I shall mention, in proof that disinterestedness is essential to true benevolence, is one that respects the love of our fellowmen; and is Matt. v. 43—47, where our Saviour says, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy: But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?"

Is it not asserted, or most manifestly implied, in these words of our great Teacher, that our love of others, if it at all resembles the divine benevolence, or is any evidence of our being born of God, must be disinterested? or must not be of that kind which is excited merely by the goodness of others to us?

I will add, in direct scripture proof of this point, only the second great commandment; "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This, in the lowest construction, must mean, that we are required to love others with the same sincerity, or to bear them the same kind of good will, that we do ourselves. Now, no man loves himself for the sake of his neighbor only: the command must therefore be understood as enjoining, that we love our neighbor, not merely for our own sake.

And as it is an evident doctrine of scripture, so it is a plain dictate of reason and common sense, that there is nothing of virtue in the love we bear to a fellow-creature, or of piety in our love of God, unless it be disinterested. No one feels obliged to another for a kindness done him, when he is well satisfied it was not out of any real good will to him, but merely from some selfish motive. And when we read in history, of actions apparently the most generous, they instantly lose all their glory, if it be discovered that the agent's own interest or honor, was his only inducement. The case is the same respecting the pharisaical devotee, or the vain-glorious martyr. Self-seeking, when it is seen, whatever may be the means, is not the thing for which a man is admired by his neighbor.

Indeed, to suppose self the primary principle, and only ultimate end, of the virtuous and good, is obviously to confound all real distinction between the best and the worst of characters. All men, and undoubtedly devils also, have self-love enough; and are capable of all those actions and affections which have this only, for their basis. If, therefore, this

were the bottom principle in the virtuous and good, it is plain, there would be no essential difference of character between saints and sinners, or between the angels of heaven and devils in hell. All the difference would be merely *circumstantial;* arising from the different conditions in which they are placed, the different treatment they receive, and the different ideas they have of the disposition of other beings towards them, or of their own interest.

Enough has been said, I think, to make it evident beyond all reasonable controversy, that the charity intended in the New-Testament must be disinterested, as well as impartial, universal benevolence.

We will now inquire, as was proposed,

II. How this is the end of the commandment. On this, we must be brief.

By the commandment, I conceive is meant, the whole moral law. In this extensive sense the word is used, Psal. cxix. 96, "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad." Prov. vi. 23, "The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light." Rom. vii. 9, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." And that this is meant by the commandment in our text, seems probable by what follows in the next verses: "From which some having swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law," &c. Nor is there any difficulty in seeing how what is here asserted of it will hold true, if we understand the commandment in this universal sense. For,

1. The end of the commandment is charity, as the design of God in every part of his holy law, was pure benevolence. Deut. vi. 24, "The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our

God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive."

2. The end of the commandment is charity, as true benevolence will lead us to feel and conduct in all respects, as the divine law requires. Christ is said to be the end of the law for righteousness to them that believe, because he hath fulfilled all righteousness for them. And in like manner, charity is the end of the commandment, because love is the fulfilling of the law. Had we an ultimate and supreme respect to the glory of God, and a proper concern for the good of our neighbor, we should keep all the ten commandments, with readiness and delight: and denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly; as the grace of God that bringeth salvation teacheth. It is very obvious, that a due degree of impartial, disinterested, universal benevolence, would be an effectual restraint from every thing which the moral law forbids, and a prevailing excitement to all those duties and virtues, which either the law or gospel requires.

3. The end of the commandment is charity, as without this there can be no such conformity to law or gospel, in any of our actions or affections, as will partake at all of the nature of righteousness and true holiness. The apostle says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." He means there is nothing in any of these which is praiseworthy, or which will be recompensed at the resurrection of

the just, if sincere love to God and men be totally wanting. And this is perfectly agreeable to reason and common sense. Certainly no gifts, nor beneficent offices, nor fortitude, nor flaming religious zeal, can please God, if we have no ultimate view to serve and glorify him. Certainly no action can have the least moral excellency, if the agent have no benevolent intention. Take away all true benevolence out of any thing which is esteemed a virtue, and you take away all the virtuousness of it, according to the feelings of every man's conscience. Let us try this with respect to *justice*. Let us suppose a judge that feareth not God, neither regardeth man; but to avoid trouble or escape reproach, he does justice in some cases: or suppose him, from custom, to have contracted a habit of passing righteous sentences, so that he takes a kind of pleasure in it; but without any thoughts of serving God, or doing good. What virtue can there be in this, any more than there is in a pair of scales when they give just weight? Let us try it with respect to truth. Is there any virtue in saying that which is true, without any benevolent or good design? If so, then it must be a virtue to speak the truth to rocks and hills, when one is alone, and knows that no creature hears him. Speaking the truth in love, is virtuous: to speak it out of malice, is vicious: to speak it without intending good or ill, is idle and impertinent. The apostle says to the Ephesians, "Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor." And he enforces it by this very good reason; "for we are members one of another." The good of every society to which we belong, requires of us a sacred regard to veracity in all our words. Without this there could be no mutual confidence; no administering justice; no knowing what ought to be done for the decision of most controversies. But if we have no regard to the commandment enjoining it, nor to the end of the commandment—the good of society or of individu-

als, no duty is done in speaking the truth. It is the same with respect to meekness. We may be angry and not sin; and we may sin in not being angry. We do well to be angry when God is dishonored, or when our neighbors are grossly injured. Meekness is commendable as far as it proceeds from a concern for the preservation of peace with men, and from respect to the command of God. For these reasons, "charity suffereth long, and is not easily provoked." But if we are not influenced by this principle, nor these motives, however long we may suffer abuses without resentment, there is no more virtue in it, than in the patience of a stump or stone. It is the same respecting humility. To be kindly affectioned, and thence in honor to prefer others, is amiable: but that lowliness of mind which arises from no disposition to render honor to whom it is due, however it may make us cringe and give place, can be nothing but despicable meanness, or the want of a manly spirit. And thus it is respecting all other things which are accounted moral virtues, or christian graces. There is nothing gracious or virtuous in them, any further than they imply a truly generous disposition. Benevolence, as now explained, is the life and soul of every thing spiritually good.

By way of improvement;

1. It should hence seem, that it might be known, without much difficulty, what a man's true character is—whether he have any real religion or not. The specific difference between a saint and an unregenerate sinner, being reduced to a single point, one would think, that difference might be discovered, to the certain knowledge of a real christian, that he has, and of the false professor, that he has not, this all decisive mark of grace. Yet,

2. It concerns us to search and look, and it may hence be seen needful to search diligently, whether

we have this root of the matter in us. There are many counterfeits of a benevolent temper and conduct. There are many ways in which self-love may put on the appearance of social or divine; and there are many lower instincts of kindness, which are apt to be mistaken for real goodness of heart. If nothing short of disinterested, impartial, universal benevolence, will stand the final test, what reason is there to fear that multitudes will at last find themselves to have been fatally deceived?

Lastly; Let christians hence be excited to covet, and by practice, and all other proper means, to cultivate, this all-important virtue. "Exercise thyself unto godliness," was the counsel of Paul to Timothy. As our bodily limbs, so the habits of the soul, are strengthened by exercise. Let us then, in this way, as well as by reading, meditation and prayer, seek to invigorate the law of kindness—the royal law, according to the scriptures. I conclude with the exhortation, Col. iii. 12, 14. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering:—And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."

SERMON VIII.

ON SELF-LOVE; OR REGARDING ONE'S OWN HAPPINESS.

HEBREWS XI. 26.

For he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

MUST not then the doctrine be false, which supposes *disinterestedness*, essential to all real virtue or religion? Moses, the great law-giver of Israel, was certainly an eminent saint: and his early choice to which these words have reference, has always been thought an illustrious instance, not only of a strong faith in the promises of God, but also of extraordinary piety and true patriotism: Yet, in thus choosing, it seems he was influenced by self-interest. An expectation of being a gainer by it in the end, was his governing motive. Nor is this mentioned at all to his reproach; but rather in his commendation. "By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: *for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*"

In order to a just statement, and right understanding of this matter, it is now proposed,

I. To consider what the recompence of reward was, to which Moses had respect; and how far he was influenced by this motive. And,

II. To inquire what the doctrine of scripture is, and what is the dictate of common sense, concerning self-love, and acting from motives of self-interest.

In the first place, let it be considered, what the recompence of reward was, to which Moses had respect.

Possibly the honor of delivering the people of God from their cruel oppressions in Egypt, and the expected happiness of inheriting with them the promised land of Canaan, flowing with milk and honey, might be motives of some weight with him. It is not to be believed, however, that any thing of an earthly nature was his principal, much less his only object. Nor are we to imagine that any temporal recompence, is at all intended by the apostle in our text. Unquestionably, the reward here meant, is the same that is spoken of in the tenth and sixteenth verses of this chapter; as what Abraham, and others before mentioned, sought, desired and looked for—"A city that hath foundations; a better country, that is, an heavenly." Though little is said in the Old Testament scriptures, of the future blessedness of the righteous, compared with the gospel, wherein Christ hath brought life and immortality to light; yet according to the apostle, those ancient patriarchs had some faith and hope of another world. And, beyond a doubt, the crown of righteousness—the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, which animated the christian martyrs, is to be understood in our text, by the recompence of the reward.

We were further to consider under the first head, how far Moses was influenced by *this* motive. It is not to be thought that his own happiness, even his eternal happiness, was the only thing to which he had an ultimate respect. From his subsequent history it very evidently appears, that he had a supreme regard for the glory of God, and a disinterested concern for the good of his people. On several occasions, when it seemed to be the divine purpose to destroy the whole congregation of Israel in the wilderness, at once, the grand anxiety of Moses, was for the honor of God's great name. He also often manifested a most generous concern for the preservation of the chosen tribes. At the foot of Sinai, when they had made a molten god, and offered sacrifice to the idol, and the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people: now, therefore, let me alone that I may consume them, and I will make of thee a great nation," Moses still intercedes, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold: Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin: and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."

I do not indeed apprehend his meaning to be, that he wished his name might be blotted out of the book of life, rather than to have the people of Israel cut off. He could not suppose that his being excluded for ever from the divine favor, would be of any avail for their salvation; nor does the manner of his intercession intimate that he offered to be blotted out of God's book, whatever he might mean by it, as the condition of their being spared. He does not say, If they cannot be forgiven *without*, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book; but if they cannot be forgiven *at all*. That is, if they must die, let me die with them. It is only, I conceive, a strong manner of saying, that his being made a great nation, could by no means reconcile him to the thoughts of having all the other tribes and families destroyed.

But whatever construction we put upon the words, it is evident from them, and from the other passages to which I have refered, that Moses had a disinterested concern for the people of Israel, and for the glory of God: and that his own private good was not the only object, to which he had an ultimate respect.

II. We will now inquire what the general doctrine of scripture is, and what is the dictate of common sense, respecting self-love, and acting from motives of self-interest. And here,

1. It is agreeable to both, I think, that actions which proceed merely from self-love, have no praiseworthiness in a moral view: or, that when we have no ultimate regard to any thing but our own interest or honor in what we do, our most specious deeds are not at all virtuous.

Thus the scriptures plainly teach. "If ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive," says our Saviour, "what reward have ye?" And the apostle says, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." It is the plain meaning of these passages, and of many others, that if self-love be the alone principle from which we act, or if our own interest or glory be our only ultimate end, however much we may promote the good of others, or the glory of God, with a subordinate view, there is nothing rewardable or praiseworthy in our seeming piety or liberality.

And this is evidently the common sense of mankind. Actions esteemed laudable, are ever supposed to imply disinterested goodness. When we know that the man who treats us with great courtesy and respect, is only courting our friendship; or that the man who relieves us in our straits and necessities, has nothing in view but to be thought liberal, or to

get something by it in the end, do we think him at all entitled to our esteem or gratitude? When we are well satisfied that the noisy patriot, is only seeking popularity and promotion, and cares nothing for his country, do we ever admire him as a virtuous character? When it is well known that the man who prays aloud in the corners of the streets, who fasts often with a sad countenance, or who offers himself to die as a martyr, does all to be seen of men, is he ever thought truly religious? "For men to search their own glory," says Solomon, "is not glory." And every one feels, that mere self-seeking, is not virtue.

2. There is such a thing as selfishness, which the word of God condemns, and which all mankind condemn, as a vice. The apostle evidently speaks in a way of censure or crimination, when he says, "All seek their own things:" and when he foretels that men shall be lovers of their own selves, as the cause of evil times, and of all manner of abominable works. And who is there that does not consider a selfish, contracted disposition, as mean, odious, and detestable? On this particular there is no need of enlarging. Yet,

3. I do not think that the sin of selfishness consists in the natural principle of self-love. I do not think it is either a dictate of common sense, or a doctrine of scripture, that it is wrong for a man to regard his own interest. If this were a thing in itself wrong, it would be so in every degree, and in all cases. It would be wrong to have the least desire of our own happiness, in itself considered; or to be influenced at all by the hope of enjoying good, or by the fear of suffering evil. But this, certainly, is not agreeable to common sense. No one supposes that it is criminal to labor in an honest calling, to procure the necessaries and comforts of life; or that all work-

ing for wages is a sin. It is never thought that taking prudent care for the preservation of one's health, or good name, or outward estate, is unlawful, or unbecoming a christian. We may use unlawful means, for preserving and furthering any of our valuable interests; but to value them, or to endeavor to secure and advance them, without transgressing any of the rules of righteousness, is what no man's conscience condemns.

Nor is it less evident that God does not condemn, all regard to our own happiness, as a moral evil. He requires that we should love our neighbor as ourselves; but no where does he forbid us to love ourselves, as well as our neighbors. In the scriptures both of the Old and New-Testament, we are urged to duty by considerations adapted to operate upon the principle of self-love. Threatenings and promises, of a personal nature, relating both to the life that now is, and that which is to come, are abundantly made use of to dissuade men from the ways of sin, and to induce them to the practice of righteousness: whence it evidently appears, that being influenced to the externals of religion and virtue, by a view to our own interest and safety, is not in itself sinful.

But if the sin of selfishness doth not consist in self-love, in what does it consist?

I answer, in not loving God and our neighbor: in not being benevolent. The difference between a truly benevolent man, and one totally selfish, I conceive, is simply this: the former is kindly affectioned towards all; the latter cares for none but himself. I know of no reason we have to think, that the most selfish man has a stronger principle of self-preservation, or a greater concern for his own happiness, than a good man has. All the radical fault in the first, I apprehend, is, he has nothing of that love which is the fulfilling of the law—he is destitute of that charity which is the end of the commandment. Men may think more highly of themselves than they

ought to think—they may have the self-love of esteem or complacency in an inordinate degree: but the self-love of benevolence, or the desire of one's own happiness, absolutely considered, is probably never to excess. Comparatively, it may indeed be excessive; and always is, in the unrighteous, or the imperfectly righteous. But then what renders it so, may be only the want, or deficiency, of disinterested benevolence. Being disposed to wish well to others, doth not, that I know of, at all lessen good will to one's self: it only regulates its operations. It restrains us from pleasing ourselves, and from promoting our own interest, in ways displeasing and injurious to others: and it excites to self-denial, and giving up one's own good, when the greater good of one's neighbor, or of the public, so requires.

Perhaps the most disinterested beings in the universe, have as tender a concern for their own preservation, and enjoyment of good, as the most selfish. But thus much is certain, I conceive, and hath now been sufficiently evinced, that self-love, considered simply as the desire of one's own safety and happiness, is not sinful.

4. There is such a thing as acting from respect to the recompence of the reward, or from the hope of inheriting the promises, which is virtuous and commendable. There is a kind of happiness, the desire of which implies holiness.

When our Saviour exhorted his hearers to labor for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, undoubtedly he set before them a motive by which they would have done well to have been influenced. When he said, "Mary hath chosen the good part which shall not be taken from her," he evidently commended her choice. When he directed his disciples to give their alms in secret, telling them they should be rewarded openly; when he said, "Love

your enemies, and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great;" and to a particular person at another time, "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed: for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just;" he plainly considered having respect to this recompence, as truly wise and praiseworthy. To the like purpose I may take notice of the words of the apostle, Rom. ii. 6, 7, where, speaking of the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, he says, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds. To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life." The Bible is full of passages in which this motive to duty is proposed; and in which, being influenced by it, is represented as laudable.

The truth of the matter respecting self-love, appears to be this: The general desire of happiness is common to all; however perfectly holy, or however totally depraved. In this, therefore, there is nothing of moral excellency, or of moral evil. It is found, indeed, in all sensitive nature; in beasts and insects, as well as in our own species. In rational creatures it will lead to virtue or vice, to holiness or sin, according to their moral taste or disposition. Wicked men, through their depravity of nature, consisting in the want of a benevolent temper, place their happiness in the gratification of selfish appetites and passions only—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." They mind earthly things—the pleasures, honors, and riches of this world, as their chief good. And in the pursuit of these, not regarding the glory of God or the good of their neighbor, they are led, unless restrained by selfish prudence, to intemperance and lewdness, to frauds and oppressions, to envy and revenge, to wars and fightings. Those, on the contrary, who have

been renewed in the spirit of their mind, by having had a principle of universal benevolence created in them, place their happiness in the advancement of the greatest universal good. They love God supremely; and to glorify him, is their chief end. They love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and therefore to be with him where he is, that they may behold his glory, is their ultimate hope: to believe in him, while now they see him not, fills them with unspeakable joy. They love their neighbor as themselves; and hence they consider the interest of others as their own, and take delight in doing good to all, as they have opportunity.

The reason why seeking the joys above is virtuous, whereas setting our affections on things on the earth is vicious, is not merely because the former are greater, or more durable, but because they are of a different nature. The pleasures of the spiritually minded in the life which now is, are an object of praiseworthy pursuit. The delight of the carnally minded are despicable and base, though supposed to be in the life to come. There is nothing better, in being influenced to painful labors and self-denials, by an expectation of the Pagan Elysian fields, or of a Mahometan paradise, than by the hope of similar indulgences and gratifications here on the earth. The eternal recompence of reward, to which good men, like Moses, have respect, is a heaven of holiness. It consists in seeing God's glory, and the good of the universe, most highly advanced, and in joining to advance them. Hence, being influenced to well-doing and patient suffering by this hope, is not only innocent; it is virtuous; it is noble; it is divine. Such was the hope, and the joy, set before Jesus himself, the author and finisher of our faith; for which he endured the cross, despising the shame.

By way of inference and application,

1. It may be seen from what has been said, That representing godliness and righteousness, as the

scriptures do, in an interesting light, is not inconsistent with reason, or with common sense.

It has been objected to the Bible, by some unbelievers, by one at least, that it is a selfish system. That it teaches us to love God and virtue, not for God's and virtue's sake, but for our own sake.

Now, it must be admitted, that the holy scriptures set life and death before men, to persuade them to forsake the ways of sin, and turn their feet unto the testimonies of the Lord: and likewise that the inspired writers address themselves to our natural gratitude, by representations of the goodness of God to the children of men, as an inducement to love, adore and serve him. But it has been proved, I apprehend, in the preceding discourse, that neither natural self-love, nor natural gratitude thence proceeding, is a principle in itself sinful, or from which it is wrong to be influenced to act. It has also been seen, that though the Bible makes use of motives adapted to work upon the natural feelings of men, to awaken their attention to the things which belong to their peace and duty; yet it never supposes that we have any true holiness, unless we love God and virtue for their own sake; or not merely from selfish principles. The scripture system of morals, is certainly as disinterested as it ought to be, according to reason and common sense. By manifestation of the truth, it will commend itself to every man's conscience, as being perfectly right in this respect.

2. What has been said may furnish an answer to one very metaphysical objection, on the other hand, against the doctrine of disinterested benevolence. It is sometimes contended, that there can be no such thing as disinterestedness. That, on supposition any place their happiness in glorifying God, and doing good; still their own happiness, is their only ultimate object.

To this, the answer is; one who has no ultimate regard to the glory of God, or the good of his neighbor, cannot place his happiness in glorifying the one, or in doing good to the other. As well might one whose palate nauseates every sweet thing, persuade himself to love honey, by representing to himself the pleasure he should take in eating it, if he did. In this sense, the saying of Solomon is true, "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned;" that is, totally unavailing. One may wish for his own sake, that he loved God and virtue; but neither this wish, nor all the world if he had it to give, could make a man sincerely love them, who has no disinterested goodness. Taking pleasure in glorifying God, and doing good to men, presupposes that we love them for their own sake; and cannot be the effect of a desire to love them, for the sake of that pleasure. This, therefore, cannot be the happiness of a totally selfish man; or a selfish kind of happiness.

3. The preceding observations upon this subject, may administer comfort to some doubting christians. I have heard some bemoan themselves, and express anxious fears that they have no grace, because they find so much in their hearts of self-love. Because, in denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously and religiously, they feel themselves so much influenced by the dread of future misery, and the hope of eternal happiness.

Let such be reminded, that looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of Jesus Christ, is the very motive by which "the grace of God that bringeth salvation teacheth us," so to deny ourselves, and so to live. That the promise of a crown of life, is an inducement to be faithful unto death, set before us by our righteous Judge.

Let them also be told, that the natural desire of their own safety, though not a virtue, is as strong in

the godly, as in the ungodly. Neither the desire of happiness, nor the dread of being miserable, though ever so ardent, is any evidence that one is *not* a christian; though something more is necessary to make it evident that one *is* a christian.

4. From what has been said, the self-deception of some others, who have perhaps no doubts of their good estate, may be detected. It seems to be thought by many, that if the happiness of heaven be the main object of one's pursuit, he has certainly been born from above. This is true indeed, if the happiness of heaven be rightly understood, and really desired. But a mistake here is very possible. An idea of heaven suited to the natural dispositions of men, is not confined to Pagans and Mahometans. The thoughts of white robes, crowns of gold, and rivers of pleasures, not spiritualized, may be very delightful to a carnal mind. By such hopes, the sensualist, the worldly-minded, and the vain-glorious, may be animated to do and suffer great things. Unless you hunger and thirst after righteousness; unless you are seeking for spiritual happiness, your hopes of heaven are vain: You are yet in your sins.

5. Let this text and subject be improved in a use of exhortation to all, to seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.

Moses, we are told, when he was come to years, chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. And did he not make a prudent choice? Had he continued in the court of Egypt, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he might have indulged the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, in a high degree. But how long ago would all these gratifications have been at an end? Great were the afflictions which he suffered with the people of God: but all these sufferings, likewise, have now long

been over. Long has he enjoyed the glorious recompence of reward to which he had respect; and he will enjoy it to all eternity.

Will you not then, those of my readers who are come to years of discretion, though young, be persuaded to make a similar choice? Will you not renounce the vanities of this present world, and the service of diverse lusts and pleasures, and make that happiness which will be permanent and soul-satisfying, the object of your most earnest pursuit? Should you hereafter see innumerable others in the kingdom of heaven, and yourselves shut out, how bitter will be your lamentation and self-reproach? Be persuaded to have respect to such eternal consequences; to pay a serious attention to the one thing needful; and to choose the good part, which shall not be taken from you.

SERMON IX.

ON THE UNIVERSAL SINFULNESS OF MANKIND.

1 JOHN I. 8.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

IN nothing do we more hate the light, and shut our eyes against it, than in regard to our own sins: and yet, in nothing is it of greater importance to us, that we should come to the knowledge of the truth. Not only must the unregenerate be effectually convinced of sin, before they will in earnest attend to the gospel of their salvation; but it is very necessary that the renewed, and even the holiest saints on earth, should have an abiding sense of their remaining imperfections; and should see that sin still dwelleth in them, and often easily besets them. This is necessary to awaken them to constant watchfulness, and exertion in the spiritual warfare; to excite them to walk humbly with God, and to make them see their need of daily pardoning mercy, and of further sanctifying grace. Great care is therefore taken in the holy scriptures, to guard persons of all characters against trusting in themselves that they are righteous, or thinking more highly of their innocence than they ought to think.

Whether any in the days of the apostles, carried this self-flattery so far as to imagine themselves wholly free from sin, which gave occasion for the caution in our text, I am not able to say. Some such, however, it is said, there now are. I understand it is the professed opinion of one sect among us, who have compassed sea and land to make proselytes, that sinless perfection is attainable in this life; and that many of them vainly boast of being themselves already thus perfect.

But it is not merely with a view to them, or to the refutation of this tenet of theirs, that I have now made choice of these words. There are many other erroneous opinions, too common at all times and in all places, the tendency of which is to make sinners flatter themselves in their own eyes, and not see that their iniquity is hateful. And many who are not much erroneous in speculation, from mere carelessness and stupidity, often feel as if they were whole, rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing. This short passage of scripture, given by inspiration of God, if duly attended to, may lead to a detection of all such delusions; and, it is hoped, may be profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, to all these sorts of persons.

That the truth of what the apostle here asserts may be more fully illustrated, I shall begin with a particular inquiry into what things are sinful, in a moral agent: Shall then show that it is a gross self-deception, for any of mankind in this world, to think they have no sin: and lastly, shall consider, how it is to be understood that the truth is not in us, if we say thus.

Our first inquiry, is concerning the things which ought to be accounted sinful, in a moral agent; or, to answer the question, What is sin?

On this question we have been taught, and some of us still teach our children to answer: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." But the apostle John, in another chapter of this epistle, according to our translation at least, seems to have given a more limited definition of sin. He says, "Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." It is however to be observed, that *his* word, [*anomia,*] which our translators have rendered, "the transgression of the law," properly signifies, *a deviation from law;* whether by going beyond it, or not coming up to it. Want of conformity, as well as transgression, may therefore be comprehended in his meaning.

But we will consider sins of commission, in the first place; and then inquire whether there must not be sin in the heart, prior to these; and also whether we may not be guilty of sins of omission, besides these.

Respecting sins of commission, or transgression, it is to be observed,

1. That whenever our external actions are wrong, and such as God hath forbidden, we transgress the law, and commit sin.

Under this particular are comprehended all idolatry; all worshipping of false gods, or making graven images, and bowing down before them: all profanation of the Lord's day, by spending any part of it in unnecessary secular labors, or idle diversions: all disobedience to parents, and undue disrespect to superiors, or any others: all murders, and unjust wars and contentions: all suicide, and intemperance: all lewd and lacivious conduct: and all robbery, theft, cheating, extortion and oppression in our dealings. Doing any of these things, is evidently transgressing,

and committing sin. The wrath of God is plainly revealed from heaven, against all such ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

2. All wicked words, whether profane, or false, or slanderous, or obscene, are sins of commission. It was the resolution of David, "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue." It is a proverb of Solomon, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin." Our Saviour says, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment: for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." And the apostle James tells us, "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: it setteth on fire the whole course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell."

3. We may transgress, and commit sin, in only the secret thoughts of our hearts. To these, the divine law extends; though human laws cannot take cognizance of them. The tenth commandment is express to this purpose; "Thou shalt not covet." And the sixth and seventh, according to our Saviour's exposition, implicitly forbid, all unreasonable anger, and every libidinous desire. The unrighteous man is required to forsake his *thoughts;* and it is said, "The *thought* of foolishness is sin." Not, indeed, all thinking of folly or wickedness. We ought often to think of our own sins, that we may repent of them; and sometimes of the sins of others, that we may reprove them. And we may have evil thoughts suggested to us, by wicked men or evil spirits, without being able to avoid it, and without being faulty. But that sin may be committed in the thoughts, intents, or desires of the heart, when it proceeds no further, is an undoubted truth. To devise evil, to meditate revenge, or to think of any wickedness, with a wish to perpetrate it, or with complacency in it, is certainly sinful.

That men may commit sin in the thought, word, and deed, will not be much disputed.

We will now inquire, whether nothing faulty is imputable to us, besides sins of commission: or, whether there may not be, what is truly of the nature of sin, prior to, or distinct from, actual transgressions. On this, I observe,

1. The Bible appears to speak of positive sin in the heart of man, antecedently to sinful actions, or words, or even thoughts; and as being the cause of all these.

I *do not* suppose indeed, that there are any evil principles or instincts in us, so radical, that they must have been created, by the immediate power of God. The corruption of our whole nature, I believe, primarily consists in the want of original righteousness, or of a good disposition. From self-love, and those appetites and passions which are not in themselves sinful, when one is destitute of virtue, that is, of the governing love of God and his neighbor, I conceive, will naturally be formed, all those roots of bitterness which springing up trouble us.

That there are, however, propensities to evil actions in depraved human nature, seems plainly taught in the holy scriptures; and this appears necessary to be supposed, in order to account for the sinful volitions of men, and their wicked external conduct. Our Saviour says, "From within, out of the *heart*, proceed evil *thoughts*, blasphemies, murders," &c. The apostle James speaks of the *lusts* of men, which war in their members, whence come wars and fightings: and he says, "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The *spirit* which dwelleth in us, lusteth to envy?" And the apostle Paul complains of a *law* in his members, warring against the law of his mind: a *law* of sin, working death: a *law* that when he would do good, evil was present

with him. By all which phrases, in these several passages, this idea seems plainly intended and expressed; that there are in fallen man, propensities of nature to moral evil. And that it must be so, may be concluded from the evil volitions and actions of men, with as much certainty as the tree is known by its fruit, or as any cause can be learnt from its constant visible effects.

But if this be the evident fact, that we have such lusts which war in us; such laws of sin; such propensities to choose the evil and refuse the good; undoubtedly, these lusts, as well as the warring of them; these laws, as well as their operation, must be sinful. If the fruit be corrupt, the tree is also corrupt. It is agreeable to scripture, as well as reason and common sense, that the *nature* of a moral agent may be holy or unholy. The psalmist says, when praising the Lord, "Thou *art* good, and doest good." And we always suppose that the Most High is worthy of praise for what he *is*, and not merely for what he *does*: for the perfections of his nature, and not merely for his wonderful works. But if God is to be praised for being good, as well as for doing good; for the same reason we are to be blamed for being bad, as well as for conducting ill. And do we not always thus judge, in accusing or excusing one another? Is not a man of an envious, revengeful, malicious disposition, whether at present provoked or not, to the actings or feelings of these passions, ever looked upon in an odious light? Is not such a disposition itself, universally disapproved, and thought hateful?

2. It seems, I think, to be the doctrine of scripture, and not disagreeable to the dictates of common sense, that mere neglects of duty, and merely the want of virtuous affections, are sinful, in a moral agent. I put the want of good affections and the omissions of duty together, because a proof of the criminality of them cannot well be separated.

It hath been said, (though not by them of old time,) that "*all sin consists in positive volition and exercise.*" None, consequently, in principle, or in being unprincipled: none in the weakness, or total want, of virtuous and religious affections: none in the omission or careless performance of any duty. It is said, that in not loving God or our neighbor; in not repenting, or not believing in Christ; in not being merciful or just; in not ever doing any good, we are guilty of no sin.

But by whomsoever, or by how manysoever, all this is said, it should not be received without examination. "To the law and to the testimony:" as far as any "speak not according to this word, there is no light in them."

That all sin consists in positives, is a position the truth of which, the very phraseology of scripture, on this subject, gives us some reason to suspect. Sin is generally expressed by negative terms: unholiness, ungodliness, unrighteousness, iniquity. Is there no *un*holiness, in the want of holiness? no *un*godliness, in not having any godliness? no *un*righteousness, in not being righteous? no *in*iquity, in never paying any regard to justice and equity?

But we have greater witness than that of mere names and phrases. How often have prophets and apostles, and how often has the Author and Finisher of our faith, blamed and condemned men for deficiencies and neglects; for the want of pious and benevolent affections, and for the omission of religious and social duties? When our Saviour said to some of his hearers, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you;" he meant, one would think, to charge them with that which was not altogether faultless. And we know he upbraided those among whom most of his mighty works had been done, denounced woes upon them, and told them it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them, "because they *repented not.*" It was like-

wise a saying of his, "He that *believeth not* is condemned already, because he hath *not believed*." In his parable of the man that had been robbed, and lay wounded and half dead; he evidently supposed that the Levite and priest, who passed by, were very culpable, for not showing kindness to one of their own nation, in such circumstances of distress. And in his representations of the day of judgment, he hath taught us in the strongest manner, that men will then be condemned for mere neglects of duty. Thus, in the parable of the talents left with servants to be improved for their lord during his absence; the one who had made no use of his talent, is, for that reason called a slothful and *wicked* servant, and ordered to be cast into outer darkness. And in the plainer account which follows, of the proceedings of that great and awful day, where we are told that the Judge will say to them on his left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;" the only crimes charged as the cause of this terrible sentence, are sins of omission. "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not." These condemned sinners are represented, indeed, as replying against their Judge, and justifying themselves: but how do they do it? by pleading to the insufficiency of the charge, or by saying they were accused only of negatives, which are nothing? Not at all; the only plea they thought it possible to make in their defence, was denying the matter of fact. "Lord," say they, "when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" The Judge answers them, "Verily, I say unto you, In as much as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." It is added, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment." To the same purpose are the words of the apostle James;

"He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy."

Many other texts might be adduced; but these are apprehended to be proofs abundantly sufficient, that, according to the scriptures, deficiency of right affection, and neglect of duty, are damnable sins.

And are not these evidently criminal, according to reason and common sense? Do we not always condemn others, when they have no benevolent concern for us, and pay no attention to us in our necessities and distresses? And do we not sometimes condemn ourselves, for the mere want of those affections, and omission of those duties, which we owe to God, and to our neighbor? Were men accusable of no other crimes than such as these, must not every mouth be stopped, and all the world stand guilty before God?

Several things, I know, are said on the other side: for ever since the fig-leaves of our first parents, many inventions have been sought out by mankind, to cover their moral nakedness.

It is said, that to suppose there can be any evil in merely not loving and obeying God, or in not being friendly or just to men, is to place sin in that which is absolutely nothing.

But it may be replied, that to suppose there can be no sin in deficiencies or omissions, is to make absolutely nothing of all positive duty. Had we nothing to do, for doing nothing we should not be to blame. But this is not the case. We have duties incumbent on us; and therefore in not doing them, there is blameworthiness. The divine law does not run altogether in negatives; as certainly it ought to have done, if in positives only, there were any moral evil. Each of the ten commandments, as they have generally been explained, imply something required, as well as something forbidden. And the two first and greatest of them, according to our Saviour, on which hang all the law and the prophets, are positively expressed. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with

all thine heart; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Can it then be thought, that if we had only avoided the whole of what is forbidden, without doing any of the things required, we should have been faultless? That if we had never hated God nor our neighbor, though we had never loved either of them at all, we should have had no sin? God's ancient revolted people were exhorted, both to cease to do evil, and learn to do well. Christians, in regard to their conversation, have both a negative and a positive injunction given them. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth; but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." And, "The grace of God which bringeth salvation teacheth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." Have we then done all, when we have left off doing evil, but never learnt to do well? when we have abstained from those evil communications which corrupt the manners of others; but have never said a word tending to edify them, or to do them any good? when we have denied ourselves, in regard to impious practices and earthly affections; but have wholly neglected works of righteousness, and all the positive duties and exercises of religion? In a word, are we to think that not to do any thing, is no sin; and, consequently, that doing nothing, is the whole duty of man?

It is said, If merely not doing be a sin, then stocks and stones are great sinners.

But as this argument goes upon the same ground as the foregoing; so it is fully answered by the apostle James: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not," says he, "to him it is sin." Moral agents only, are capable of being to blame, whether in motion or at rest. Stocks and stones, having no duty to do, are blameless in not doing any: but a

man, cannot always lie still, like them, without blameworthiness.

It is said that whenever we neglect any duty, we will the neglect of it, or are doing something which is sinful: that whenever we are wanting in any good exercise of heart, we have an evil exercise in opposition to it; and that it is only for these opposite exercises, volitions and actions, that either God or our own heart condemns us. But I know of no evidence, that the first part of this assertion is true; and the last part of it, I think, is evidently false.

I am not certain, that whenever we neglect any duty, we will the neglect. It used to be thought there were careless neglects, as well as wilful neglects. And I am persuaded that persons are often very faulty in omitting duties, without designing to omit them. For instance; one ought to have visited a sick or bereaved neighbor; and intended it at a certain time, and never determined the contrary: but when the time came, he wholly forgot it; and the only blameable cause of such forgetfulness, was his not having a duly benevolent concern for the person in distress or affliction. I am not certain, that when a man neglects what he ought to do, he is always doing what he ought not. He may be taken up about some business which is lawful, and which would have been his duty, were it not for his neglecting another duty to which, at present, he has a more pressing call. I am not certain, that whenever one is deficient in any virtuous affection, he has just so much of that vicious affection which is its reverse. It is very possible that the priest and Levite, in our Saviour's parable, might have had no enmity to the man who lay wounded by the way-side. The only fault represented, and the only one which need be supposed, was their want of charity.

If, however, it were the case, that a man always hates, those whom he does not perfectly love; that whenever a man omits what he ought to do, he wills

the omission of it; or that one is always wickedly employed, when he neglects any duty; still these are different faults, and he is doubly guilty. Ceasing to worship the true God, is one thing; worshipping false gods, is another: hence the Holy One of Israel says, Jer. ii. 13, "My people have committed *two* evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

The arguments now mentioned, are the only ones worthy of notice, which I recollect to have heard or seen, in support of the strange tenet, that not loving God, or our neighbor, or not doing any good, is no sin. Whether these have any real weight, every one must judge.

There is one particular more, which I designed briefly to have illustrated under the present head: namely, that the mere want of a good disposition, in one who has the natural capacities of mankind, is a moral evil.

For the truth of this, as well as the foregoing particulars, I think, we have the concurring full testimony of our best witnesses and guides, on all moral and religious subjects—scripture and common sense. Paul resolves all the darkness of understanding in the heathen Gentiles, all the ignorance that was in them, and all their alienation from the life of God, into the blindness of their heart. In the Old Testament, God's chosen people are often spoken of as being criminally stupid, in not having eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to understand. And our blessed Saviour, who was never angry without a cause, looked round upon men with anger, we are told, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts. By hardness of heart is meant, insensibility—an unfeeling disposition—a temper of mind incapable of the love of God, of Godly sorrow for sin, or of any true benevolence. And who is there that has never had his indignation excited, at seeing such hard-

heartedness? Is it not a failing, which may well provoke something more than pity, for a man to be unfeeling, or totally unapt to feel, for any besides himself? Certainly, an unprincipled man—a man of no generosity or integrity—one altogether destitute of an honest and good heart, is considered universally as a blameable character.

But it is time to close the present discourse. May we all learn not to flatter ourselves, until, too late, our iniquity is found to be hateful. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

SERMON X.

ON THE UNIVERSAL SINFULNESS OF MANKIND.

1 JOHN I. 8.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

IN order to the more full illustration of what is here asserted, I undertook to show—What things in us are sinful—That it is a gross self-deception in any of us to say, We have no sin—and, How it is to be understood that the truth is not in us, if we say this.

We have hitherto attended only to the first of these heads; or to the important and disputed question, What is sin?

In general, it was said, agreeably to the answer in our shorter catechism, that sin is justly imputable to us, whenever we transgress any of the commandments of God: and also, whenever we are not perfectly conformed to the whole moral law, in our lives, and in our hearts.

More particularly, on the one hand, it was observed, that every forbidden action we do; every wicked word we speak; and every evil thought we indulge, or affection we feel, and every propensity of nature in us to any thing not perfectly right, is sin. On the

other hand, a more labored proof was attempted, that any want of conformity to the law of God, must be sinful, in creatures of our capacities, and under our obligations. That if we neglect, or imperfectly perform, any duty; if we have not the love of God in us, or are wanting in good will to our fellow-men; if we do not repent, or do not believe in Christ; or if we be destitute of, or deficient in, a right temper of mind: in a word, unless we do perfectly well, and are perfectly good, so far sin lieth at our door.

I now proceed, and shall endeavor to show,

II. That if any of us say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. That is, if we think thus: for so the apostle is certainly to be understood. We may deceive others, by saying what we know is false; but to believe a lie, being imposed upon by our own hearts, is self-deception.

Perhaps it may be thought, that no one will imagine concerning himself, what is here supposed; and therefore that the point now before us needs no proof, and will admit of little profitable enlargement. But it is really one of the most difficult points to establish, to the sensible conviction of every man's conscience. Not that there would be any difficulty in it, were it not a truth which is against every man, and which therefore every man will be against. Were it not that the hearts of men, which are full of pride and selfish partiality, will be ever ready to fill their heads with sophistical arguments in their own exculpation. Only exhibiting the general proofs that all men are sinners, which might soon be done, would consequentially prove, that any one must be self-deceived, who supposes he has no sin. But I shall be more particular: and attend to the several senses in which one may say this, and the several grounds on which it may be said. A man's meaning, when he says it, may be; that he never has been guilty of any sin; or he may

mean only, that now he is free from all sin. And according to the different senses in which this is said, the grounds that men go upon in saying it will be different. We will go over the several grounds on which men may say this, in one or the other of these senses; and see if we cannot discover the fallacy of saying it in either sense, on any ground.

1. Some may say in their hearts that they have no sin, and never have had any, because they imagine that they have always meant well, and done the best they could. If they have not done so much as some others, it has been because of their want of talents, or of opportunities; and not because of any want of a *willing mind*. If they have sometimes dishonored God, or done hurt to their fellow-men, it was owing to ignorance, or to inadvertency, and not to any bad intention. They have always endeavored to do right, and can recollect few if any instances in which they have conducted much amiss. Thus it was with the young ruler who came running to Christ, and respectfully inquired of him what good thing he must do, that he might have eternal life. When our Saviour directed him to keep the commandments, and mentioned several of them, he readily replied, "All these have I observed from my youth up; what lack I yet?"

But if on this ground any say they have no sin, certainly they deceive themselves. "The commandment is exceeding broad." No man can think that he has never been guilty of any transgression of God's perfect law, nor of any want of conformity to it, when he rightly understands all that it forbids, and all that it requires. But unconvinced sinners have always some cloak for their sins. The present imperfect state of fallen man, is an excuse ever ready at hand. We know that we come short; and we know that we transgress: but who does not? or how is it possible that such poor frail creatures should be as

holy as angels? "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." We wish to be perfect; but it is not in our power. Thus men justify themselves. And they would indeed be altogether justifiable, were this truly the case. "If there be a willing mind, it is accepted," in all cases, "according to that a man hath." But that any imagine their wills or wishes are so good, can be owing only to the deceitfulness of sin. The want of a disposition, is all the inability we labor under to do whatever God requires of us. Paul says, indeed, he found a law that when he would do good, evil was present with him. This, however, was the law of sin—the remainder of depraved nature. His desire to do the whole will of God was sincere; but it was not perfect. He found much in himself that was contrary to it, whence he was often overcome by temptation. This he acknowledges to be *sin* that dwelt in him. He speaks of it as a crime, not as an excuse.

But the heart which is desperately wicked, is deceitful above all things; who can know it? Those in whom its depravity is total, have often no real apprehension of its being depraved at all. Their impotency to that which is good, and to keep themselves from what is evil, they conceive to be in their heads, or hands, or feet; and know not that it is in their hearts. Hence they complain of it as a weakness, and do not condemn it as any wickedness.

Some, however, insist that their inability renders them excusable, let it be where it will, and what it will. If the seat of it be in their heart, they cannot help it. They were born with such depraved dispositions, and they are unable to alter them: how then is having them, or acting according to them, their fault? Just as if a bad heart were not at all blameable in itself. Just as if it were not our duty to do good, or to abstain from doing evil, any further than we have an inclination. Do we ever reason thus, except in our own case? Do we not always think others faulty

when they do ill, though we charitably believe their hearts are no better than our own? What father is there that doth not condemn an undutiful son? what master is there that doth not blame a disobedient servant? what man is there that doth not cry out against a neighbor who hath slandered him, or defrauded him, or robbed and wounded him? And yet the undutiful son, the disobedient servant, the slanderer, the defrauder, the robber, or murderer, may all plead not guilty on this ground, as well as any sinner against God. They have all wicked hearts: they were born with them; and cannot alter them, nor try to alter them. Men will for ever condemn others, when injured or abused, notwithstanding such an excuse as this: if therefore we justify ourselves on this ground, our own mouths condemn us: if we say that we are perfect, because we do as well as can be expected from imperfect creatures, it proves us perverse.

2. Some excuse themselves, as if they had no sin, under a notion that they are not free agents.

Our wills, say they, are governed by motives, as constantly, as invariably, as necessarily, as the heavenly bodies are moved by attraction; or as the rivers run, and a stone falls, by gravitation. Besides, God hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass. All the volitions and actions of men are according to his fixed eternal purpose; and are under the perfect guidance of his uncontrolable Providence. Consequently, we never could have done, or said, or thought, otherwise than exactly as we have. How then can we have any more moral agency than inanimate matter? or how can we be any more to blame than the winds or waves, for any irregularities?

To this formidable argument, which bids fair for excluding all possibility of praise or blameworthiness out of the whole universe; I answer,

(1.) It is not the instability, the contingence, the randomness, with which a being acts, that constitutes him a free agent; nor is it the regularity, constancy, or necessity, of the motions of inanimate bodies, that makes *them* not free. Were all the revolving planets and comets at full liberty from all the laws of nature, they would not be free agents, any more than they now are. Nor are intelligent creatures less free, because they are actuated regularly, and with a kind of necessity, by certain laws or principles of action; than if they had nothing, either in or out of themselves, to stimulate or restrain them. If all bodies in the material world were to be let loose from all the laws of nature, and from the governing Providence of God; and could they be supposed to move at perfect random, having nothing to direct them; still their motions would not be voluntary; and therefore, they would not be free agents. On the contrary, angels and men, though acting necessarily according to their own dispositions; though influenced always by motives; and though under the entire government of an over-ruling Providence, may yet act altogether voluntarily; and, of consequence, with the fullest conceivable freedom of moral agency. I answer,

(2.) That kind of necessity which implies an impossibility of acting otherwise than agreeably to one's own mind, is essential to the liberty of a moral agent.

If the actions of rational beings, were not necessarily according to their own dispositions, they would not be free. Such actions would not be *their* actions. *They* could have no government over them, and would deserve no praise or blame for them. If a man could act entirely contrary to his own will, or could will entirely contrary to his own disposition, what a strange kind of freedom would he have! Would any one wish for such freedom? would any one fault him-

elf, or even his neighbor, for volitions and actions which were thus free? Were it possible for *God* to act contrary to the infinite holiness of his nature; or were it possible for him to change his nature, and become disposed to cruelty, falsehood and unrighteousness; would he be a more free agent, a more glorious Being, or more worthy of our confidence, adoration and praise?

That liberty to act either way, in all cases, contrary to the inclination of the agent, as well as according to it, for which some contend, is a kind of liberty inconsistent with all moral agency. Such necessity as implies an impossibility of acting, or willing to act, otherwise than agreeably to one's own disposition, is essential to that freedom of a moral agent, which alone can render him deserving of praise or blame, for any actions. And this is all the necessity which need be supposed, in the spontaneous actions of men. I answer,

(3.) To say that we have no sin, because we have no freedom of will, is most plainly contrary to scripture, and to all common sense.

The whole Bible evidently goes upon the supposition that man is a free agent; and so do all mankind, in their treatment of one another. If we imagine that men have not that freedom which is necessary to constitute them moral agents, and to render them capable of moral evil, what must we think of all laws, exhortations, counsels and reproofs, human and divine, which are given to mankind; and of all punishments inflicted upon or threatened them. If men were mere machines—if, like the heathen gods of wood and stone, they could not do evil, neither were it in them to do good, to give them any commands would be palpably absurd; to counsel or admonish them would be perfect nonsense; to reprehend or punish them, would be most unreasonable and unjust. And on this supposition what must

we *think* of the plainest dictates and feelings of our own minds? Do we not resent the injuries done us by our fellow-men, in a very different manner from what we do any hurts received from inanimate things? Are we not angry with the instruments of our suffering pain or damage, in the one case, as we are not in the other? Do we not all of us feel that law written on our hearts, of which the apostle speaks—the law of conscience, accusing, or else excusing one another? We must disbelieve the whole word of God; we must contradict the most evident belief of all mankind, and we must give up, as illusory and false, the plainest feelings of our own minds, before we can suppose ourselves *such* necessary agents, as to be incapable of blameworthiness. But,

3. Some may say, that they are chargeable with no sin, because they have never done that which will eventually be any damage. They have never hurt God, nor the creation of God. All will end well; therefore, "Whatever is, is right." Right, not only in Him who eternally planned it, and providentially orders it; but right in the actors of it. God will not appear less glorious in the end, nor will there be less happiness in the universe, for us, or for any of our actions. On the contrary, whatever we have been, or whatever we have done, was designed and ordered by infinite wisdom, as necessary for the greatest universal good. Why then should we be sorry for it, or condemn ourselves, or be condemned?

This imagination, like the forementioned ones, at first appearance, exalteth itself as an impregnable fortress for the defence of sinners: but when judgment is laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet, it must be swept away, with other refuges of lies and hiding places of falsehood. Reason and conscience, if only attended to, will tell every

n, that when he has acted wickedly, and with a
ked mind, he is not at all the less to blame, be-
se the intended mischief is prevented by another ;
ecause the evil action is made the occasion of
d. And the holy scriptures abundantly inform
that God views the matter in this light. He used
buchadnezzar as his battle-axe, to cut down his
mies ; and as his rod for the chastisement of his
olted chosen people. Howbeit, since *he* meant
so, neither did *his* heart think so ; but it was in
heart only to enrich and aggrandize himself, by
troying nations not a few ; God says, " When I
ll have performed my whole work upon mount
n, and on Jerusalem, I will punish the stout heart
the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high
ks."

Iow is it that the actual damage arising from the
uities of men is prevented, and that they are made
means of good ? It is generally and principally by
punishment of them. Thus God made the op-
ssions and obstinacy of Pharaoh and the Eyptians,
occasion of his name's being declared throughout
he earth, by overthrowing and drowning them in
Red Sea. And thus will he get glory to himself,
, in displaying his holiness, will exceedingly in-
ise the happiness of the good part of the intellect-
creation, from the sins of all finally impenitent
kers of iniquity, by the terrible punishment of
n in that lake of fire, whence the smoke of their
nent shall ascend up for ever and ever.

Who can say that God would not actually be hurt,
is glory and happiness ; or that eternal damage
ld not be done to the universe, by every sin, were
t that he can thus ease himself of his adversaries,
be avenged on his enemies ? Were it not that he
shew his wrath, and make his power known, in
r exemplary punishment ; except they make their
e with him, in the wonderful way provided? Were
t that those who walk in pride, he is able to abase,

and will abase? And shall we think that sin is no sin, and deserves no punishment, because God Almighty, by punishing it in such glorious justice, can vindicate his own injured honor, and secure the greatest general good! If any can seriously imagine this, I know not to what strong delusions they may not be left, or what strange lies they may not believe.

But there are some others who only say that they have now no sin, though once they were great sinners. Either they think themselves perfectly sanctified; or that perfect holiness is not required of them; or else that their sins are done away, in every sense, by the atonement of Christ, and the pardoning mercy of God. We will consider each of these claims to innocence, separately and distinctly.

1. Some say they have no sin, from an imagination of their being perfectly sanctified. God is able, indeed; did it seem good in his sight, to sanctify men wholly in this life: but that he never sees fit to do it, we have abundant reason to conclude from his word. There are left upon sacred record, not only great sins of some of the holiest men, but also the humble confessions of most eminent saints; such as Job, David, Isaiah, and Paul, that *they* were far from having attained to sinless perfection. It is also demanded, "Who can say,—I am pure from my sin?" And it is expressly said, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doth good, and sinneth not." From all which it may be concluded, with great certainty, that if any say their sanctification is perfect, it is but a vain boast, or a foolish self-deception. But,

2. Some may say that they have no sin, from an imagination that perfection is not now required of them. They may suppose that the old law, demanding a perfect life, and a perfect heart, is disannulled; and a new one substituted, making sincere obedience only, the whole duty of a christian. This notion

they ground, I suppose, on such texts as Rom. vi. 14, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace." But if that, text, and others like it, have reference to the *moral* law, they must be understood of it, only as a *covenant* of *works*. Believers are delivered from even the moral law in this view: that is, they are not under its condemning sentence to eternal death, however numerous and aggravated their sins may have been; and they have the promise of eternal life, though their obedience is still imperfect. This is implied in their being justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption of Jesus Christ. And this is all the sense in which they are not still under the moral law. Certainly they are not delivered from the law of perfection, as the rule to which they are bound in duty to be conformed. To suppose any man delivered from this law in that sense, is to suppose it right, for him to do that which is in some measure wrong. It is to suppose that, without sinless perfection, one can be perfectly free from sin: than which nothing can be a more express contradiction. If on this ground, any imagine they have no sin, they are certainly deceived.

3. There is one ground more, on which some say this; namely, because it is supposed that their sins, past, present, and to come, are all blotted out and done away by the blood of Christ, and by the pardoning mercy of God. And indeed, the expressions of scripture are very strong in some places, respecting the deliverance of believers, by these means, from all sin. As to the imputed atonement of our Redeemer, it is said, Rom. viii. 1, "There is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." And ver. 33, 34, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect. It is God that justifieth: who is he that commendeth? it is Christ that died." As to the pardoning mercy of God, we read, Psal. xxxii. 1, 2, "Blessed is he whose iniquity is forgiven,

whose sin is covered: Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." Psal. ciii. 12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Micah vii. 19, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea." And Acts iii. 19, "Repent,—and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." From the literal language of such texts as these, were there nothing to teach us otherwise, we might be ready to suppose, that on repentance and faith in the blood of Christ, sinners were delivered from all *desert*, as well as from all *danger*, of wrath and punishment. But conscience, and reason, and the general current of scripture, all jointly testify that this cannot be the case. Nothing is more plainly contrary to reason, than that a man should cease to be *faulty*, when his sins are forgiven; or that the *blameworthiness* of one person, can be taken away by the suffering of another. Nothing is more contrary to the feelings of every true penitent, than either of these suppositions. Nor can any thing be more contrary to the express declarations of God's word; or to his evident dealings with good men. How is this consistent with the humiliation, mourning, and remorse for their sins, so often expressed by saints, both under the Old Testament and the New? How is this consistent with the many reprehensions given to good men, in all parts of the Bible? how is it consistent with God's threatenings to visit, and with his so often actually visiting, the transgression of his children with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes? Those who have no sin, deserve no corrections or rebukes; and have no occasion for godly sorrow, or self-reproach.

The forgiveness of sins, by whatever strong figurative terms it is sometimes expressed, can really intend no more than the remission of their eternal punishment. The atonement of Christ, though infinite, only delivers believers from the wrath to come. The justification of christians, however full, doth

not imply that, even by imputation, they are so righteous as to have no sin, justly imputable to them. Repenting sinners, believing sinners, pardoned and justified sinners, are sinners still. They have as much reason as ever, and more reason than ever, to remember, and be confounded, and never open their mouths any more, because of their shame, when God is thus pacified toward them after all that they have done. For any on this ground, to imagine that they cease to have any blameworthiness, is certainly a very great self-deception.

And it may be observed, that to guard against an idea that believers become free from ill-desert, by their interest in the atonement of Christ, appears to be the particular design of our text. For the apostle having said, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin," he immediately adds, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves."

It remains to be considered, how we are to understand that the truth is not in us, if we say this.

I suppose the meaning is, not merely that in our thinking thus there is no truth; but that we have not in us the truth of religion. This, however, must be understood with some qualification. I do not apprehend that a man's *implicitly* saying he has no sin, is any certain evidence of his having no grace. Men may hold opinions which imply that no man has any sin, and yet be as sensible of their own sins as if they held no such inconsistent opinions. Or men may have such wrong ideas of certain gospel doctrines as imply, by way of necessary consequence, that believers in Christ are free from all blameworthiness; and yet blame themselves, for all their transgressions and moral imperfections, as much as others do who have no such erroneous apprehensions. Nor do I think but that good men may say *explicitly*, that they have no sin, through inadvertence. In the heat and hurry

of dispute, a man may be driven to admit the consequence of what he maintains, when nothing is further from his settled inward sentiments. I suppose it is only when a man says this in his heart, or when he seriously belives it, that his saying he has no sin, is an evidence of his having no holiness. And thus understood, this last assertion in our text, appears not incredible, or uncharitable.

Certainly one who has always thought he had no sin, cannot be a true christian; because such an one cannot have had either repentance toward God, or faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

And if any seriously believe that they have *now* no sin, on whatever grounds such an imagination may be built, it is not unreasonable to suppose they can have no grace.

If a person thinks that he is sanctified wholly, or has already attained to sinless perfection, have we not reason to suspect, and even to conclude, that he knoweth nothing of religion, as he ought to know? When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up, and the seraphims covering their faces; while they cried, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory;" he says, "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." When the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind; that holy man could only say in reply, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." And he had said long before, while maintaining his integrity; "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse." From such confessions of the best of men, and from many other things in the holy scriptures, it may well be concluded, that those who imagine they have attained to perfection in holiness, are only alive without the law, like Paul while a pharisee.

But if persons think they have no sin, because they are under a new law, which allows of some sin, certainly neither the truth of scripture, nor common sense, can be in them.

And must it not be evident, also, that, if any really suppose all desert of punishment or blame is taken away from them by the atoning blood of Christ, or by the pardoning mercy of God, they are not true christians. Good men go mourning all their days because of the iniquities of their youth, and under a humbling sense of their remaining imperfections. But this, surely, is inconsistent with their feeling as if, by reason of the imputed righteousness of Christ, or from any other cause, no sin were now justly imputable to them.

On the application of this subject, only a few thoughts will be suggested.

1. Hence learn not to place much dependance on the high professions any make, or the great opinion they appear to have, of their own goodness. Such professions and apprehensions, are generally an evidence of insincerity, or self-deception, rather than of eminent real piety. Our Saviour says, "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." And again, "He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory." Yet, in this way, many have acquired, and still acquire, great popularity. "Of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women," and silly men. "While they speak great swelling words of vanity," relating their own wonderful experiences, and proclaiming their own fervent godliness, and ardent benevolence, "they allure" many; thus "beguiling unstable souls." To the stupid admirers of such, may be applied the admonition of the psalmist; "Understand, ye brutish among the people; and, ye fools, when will ye be wise?"

2. Hence let all sinners, who are convinced that they have no cloak for their sins, be exhorted to flee for refuge, and lay hold upon the hope set before us in the gospel. God hath made ample provision for the vilest transgressors, that they may be washed, that they may be sanctified, that they may be justified; that they may be delivered from the wrath to come, and may have everlasting life. Repent, then, and be converted; so iniquity shall not be your ruin; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.

3. Since believers cannot expect to be made perfect in holiness till their death, and shall then be wholly sanctified, let them hence be excited to contemplate that solemn period, with joyful anticipation. Well may every assured believer, adopt the words of David, addressed to our Father in heaven; "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

SERMON XI.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN.

ROMANS V. 18.

By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation.

OF all the articles of faith which have had the reputation of orthodoxy, or have generally been supposed to be plainly taught in the holy scriptures, none perhaps, have made more infidels; and none appear indeed, harder to reconcile with reason and common sense, than the doctrines of imputed sin, and imputed righteousness. There are some others which may not be less incomprehensible; particularly the doctrine of three persons in one God, and that of two distinct natures in the one person of Jesus Christ. But then these are altogether above our full investigation, rather than evidently contrary to human reason. Besides, in the God-head, and in the Divine Mediator, things wonderful, and secret things which belong to God alone, might well be expected: whereas the just grounds of our own condemnation, when we are condemned; and of our justification, when we are justified, one would think, were among the things which it should belong to us to understand. But how sin can justly be imputed to the personally

innocent; or righteousness to those who are personally sinful—how one can deserve condemnation because another has sinned, or justification and a reward because another has been obedient, at first view, it looks hard to conceive, if not utterly impossible ever to comprehend.

Such, however, is the weakness of our reason, and so liable are we to err in judgment, that it surely does not become us hastily to reject the Bible, which has so much evidence of being the word of God, merely because it contains a few such apparent paradoxes as these. Nor should we despair of seeing the reasonableness, of what the scriptures really teach concerning these doctrines, without a patient and very careful examination.

In the New-Testament or the Old, the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, and of the righteousness of Christ to believers in him, are no where taught, I think, in more plain and express terms, than in this passage, part of which has been now read. The apostle here says, "As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

But at present I have chosen to pay a particular attention only to the former of these doctrines—that of original sin. On this subject it is proposed,

I. To show, that all men are now by nature in a state of sin and condemnation.

II. That they were brought into this state by the fall of Adam: and,

III. To see if this may not be so understood, as to appear consistent with justice.

That all men are now, by some means or other, in a state of sin, is evident,

1. From what is expressly said in scripture, and what is plainly seen or known in fact, of the early and universal depravity of mankind.

We are told of God's saying to Noah, after the flood, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." It is said, Eccl. vii. 20, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doth good, and sinneth not." The apostle says, Rom. iii. 9, 10, "We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." In Psal. lviii. 3, it is said, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies."

And have we not abundant evidence from our own observation, that mankind of every age, are more or less wicked? Do not little children early go astray still, and speak lies? and do they not discover evil inclinations, long before they can speak or go alone? Do we not plainly see in them many symptoms, from their very birth, of the same tempers and passions, some of the same at least, which break out afterwards, in all manner of evil works? And when we consider how this whole world from the time that men began to multiply, hath ever been, and still is, "like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt:" what a multitude of rulers, laws and punishments, have been found necessary for the preservation of any peace in society; which after all, has been but very imperfectly preserved: what scenes of wars and fightings among the nations, are perpetually exhibited: what vast armies of human beings, have been slaughtered by human hands: what a Golgotha and an Aceldama the earth has been, ever since it was stained with the blood of Abel:—when we consider all these things, have we not a most sensible, shocking evidence of the truth of

Solomon's observation? "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil; and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."

2. The mortality of mankind, in every period of life, is a full proof of their being sinners from the birth.

Death, was the original threatening for *sin*. *Temporal* death, was expressly a part of the sentence passed upon Adam: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." And that God doth not, and that it may be concluded from his perfections he never will, inflict the pains of death, on any of his rational creatures who are free from sin, is plainly implied in several passages of scripture. "Remember, I pray thee," says Eliphaz to Job, "who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" And Abraham says, in his intercession to God for Sodom, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?——That be far from thee:—shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" When therefore, we see that no age is exempted from the stroke of death—when we see infants thus destroyed, as well as adults; when we are so often witnesses of their being cut off with pining sickness, or taken out of the world suddenly by terrible convulsions; have we not indisputable evidence, that, in the view of Him who knoweth all things, even infants are not innocent?

The apostle in our context, is supposed to make use of this argument, in proof of original sin. He speaks of the passing of death upon all men, and of its reigning even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression. That is, I conceive, over infants; who could not have transgressed any known law of God, as Adam did. The argument is grounded on the justice of God, with which it is supposed inconsistent to inflict such a death as we now die, on all men, of every age, unless all were some way really sinful.

To evade this evidence, some have said, the sufferings of infants may be compensated, or made up to them. They may, for ought that we know, all of them, enjoy, in this life, or in the life to come, more than they suffer. Their existence, the whole of it taken together, may be preferable to non-existence. And if it be so, then no injury is done them, by the pains they are made to endure, though they be perfectly free from sin.

But, it may be observed, in answer to this evasion, that it is not very agreeable to our ideas of a just judge, to inflict pains and penalties on an innocent person, because he has done him good before; or means to satisfy him for the injury afterwards.

It may be answered also, that this would destroy all distinction between the innocent and the guilty, in regard to the proper treatment of them; and so would utterly defeat the grand design of inflicting punishment on evil doers. If such a way of procedure were just, and known to be so, displeasure could never be made manifest by punishing. Suffering could never, in any case, be a certain proof of sin. Upon the principle of this evasion, inflicting the pains of hell, for millions of ages, on the most innocent, might be perfectly just: nor could it ever be known by the torments of any of the damned, that God was at all angry with them, or that they were not as pure as the angels of heaven, in his sight. For, until the end of eternity, this possibility will remain, of their receiving more good than they suffer evil. Their existence, for ought that any creature can tell, may still be made better to them than non-existence. After the longest duration of most extreme misery, suffered for no offence, there will be time enough, or eternity enough, for all to be amply made up to them, in the enjoyment of still more durable happiness. And consequently, if such a way of treating innocent creatures were just, God could never *show* his wrath by punishing any workers of iniquity: because it never

could be made known to finite minds, who were the objects of his holy displeasure, by the infliction of the greatest and longest continued torments possible.

In regard to present outward dispensations, there is indeed a sense in which, as Solomon observes, "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." That is, no one can determine that he is in a state of favor with God, because of the temporal blessings he enjoys; or that he is under God's wrath and curse, as an unpardoned sinner, by reason of the temporal afflictions he suffers. In this life, the righteous and the wicked partake promiscuously of evil and good, of adversity and prosperity. Thus, "all things come alike to all." The reason is, all are sinners, and all are under a dispensation of grace. Many are the afflictions of some righteous persons, and the wicked sometimes prosper in the world; because this is a state of probation, and not of retribution. Yet even now no living man has reason to complain; for no one suffers more than the righteous punishment of his sins. All have reason to be thankful; for all are punished less than their iniquities deserve. God's hatred of something in us may certainly be known by every pain we feel; though the greatest temporal afflictions, are no infallible evidence of a state of wrath; much less, of final reprobation. But if sufferings may be supposed, in God's moral kingdom, where there is no imputation of sin, the ground is given up of ever knowing the divine hatred of any thing in any creatures, by his righteous judgments inflicted on them, either in this world, or in the world to come. Therefore the common painful dissolution of infants, plainly proves that they are some way sinful in the sight of God.

3. This is likewise evident from the means which God hath ordained for the salvation of infants. Those who believe the divine institution of infant baptism, must admit that infants have sin imputed to them,

or inherent in them: for there can be no occasion for baptizing any but sinners, in the name of a Saviour or of a Sanctifier. If infants were innocent, they would not need the application of that water, by which is signified our being washed, justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God. The only conceivable reason why none of the human race can enter into the kingdom of God, without being born of water and of the Spirit, is the one assigned by our Saviour; "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

And those who do not believe that infants are to be baptized, must still, I think, be convinced that we are born in sin, from the certain divine institution of infant circumcision. For that, as well as baptism, signified the taking away of sin; and was a seal of the righteousness of faith; neither of which can be requisite for any besides fallen, depraved creatures. It may be added, under this head, the doctrine that the natural state of man, is a state of condemnation, is expressly asserted, Eph. ii. 1, 2, 3, where, having said, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein, in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;" the apostle adds, "Among whom *we* also," (we Jews, as well as you Gentiles,) "all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were *by nature the children of wrath*, even *as others*.

II. I proceed to show that we were brought into this state by the fall of Adam. And here,

1. This we are plainly taught in several passages of scripture. See Job xiv. 4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." Psal. lv. 5, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my

mother conceive me." And John iii. 6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." These words of Job, of David, and of our Saviour, evidently teach us, that sin descends to all the human race by ordinary generation; and plainly point to the origin of it, in the depravity and guilt of our first parents. See also, 1 Cor. xv. 22—"In Adam all die."

I do not know, however, that we are obliged by this, or by the text we are now upon, to conclude that the first man, exclusively of the first woman, was the alone meritorious cause of the ruin of all mankind. This may not inevitably follow from its being said, "In *Adam* all die:" for it is said, when "God created man, male and female, he called *their* name *Adam*." Nor is it certain that our being brought into the present state of sin and misery, might not be by the sin of *Eve* in part, because it is said, "By the offence of *one*, judgment came:" for of a man and his wife we are told, "They are no more twain, but *one* flesh." From its being said, "The judgment came upon all *men*, we might perhaps as well suppose that *women* are not included under this original condemnation; as we can infer from the mention of one only, by whose offence this came, that, the disobedience of Eve is to be considered as having no hand in bringing her posterity into their present unhappy state of sin and condemnation. It is made use of by the apostle Paul as an argument for the subjection of wives to their husbands, that the woman was deceived, and was first in the transgression. And we know that the sentence passed upon Eve, as well as that upon Adam, is perpetuated through all generations.

2. That all men were brought into the present fallen state by the fall of one or both of our first parents, is evident from the continuation of the very same curse that was denounced upon them, as to the temporal part of it at least, down to the present day.

Unto the woman God said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake: in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee: and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

Now, when we see every part of this sentence so exactly executed still, on the sons and daughters of these first human transgressors; have we not the most sensible evidence that their offspring were included with them, thus far at least, in their original condemnation?

And if, as to the present life, and temporal death, we are evidently dealt with according to the sentence passed upon our first parents; what reason have we to think that we were not, according to the original constitution, to be dealt with in like manner relative to the life to come? It is no easier to reconcile with reason and justice, our being involved so far in the bitter consequences of their sin, as we certainly at present are, than it is our sharing in all the fruits of man's first apostacy.

We proceed, therefore, as was proposed,

III. To inquire, whether what we are taught in scripture, and see in fact, of the connection between Adam's first sin, and the condemnation of all his posterity, may not be so understood, as to render it consistent with the justice of God, according to our natural notions of justice.

It has been thought, pretty generally I suppose, that Adam's act in eating of the forbidden fruit, is so imputed to all his children, that they are condemned for it, just as if it had been their own personal transgression. It appears to have been the opinion of many great and good divines, at least, that this is the true scripture doctrine of original sin. But, if it be so, it is, to be sure, a great mystery. The notion of such a transfer of criminality from Adam to his race, is grounded on a supposed divine constitution, making them one in law: but how they could be so made one, in truth and justice, as that *his* act should be *their* act; *his* disobedience *their* disobedience; or so as that *they* can be righteously punished, or blamed, for *his* sin, it is hard to understand. Adam and we, after all, are different persons; and actual demerit, as well as merit, according to all our natural notions, must necessarily be ever personal. We always think —we always feel, even in cases wherein we are most disposed to condemn, that no one is blameworthy for another's transgression, which he knew nothing of, or to which he was no way accessory. And indeed, God himself says, Ezek. xviii. 20, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him; and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." And he seems implicitly to admit, in the plainest manner, that if it were otherwise —if the men of that generation were actually punished, not for their own sins—not for any thing faulty in themselves, but merely because their fathers, some ages before, had been great sinners, there would be just ground for their saying, as they did; "The ways of the Lord are not equal." But why God might not have made it as equal, to punish the Israelites in Babylon for the iniquities of their more immediate ancestors, as to condemn all men to eternal, or even to temporal death, for the offence of Adam, it is difficult to comprehend.

It seems to be a clear dictate of common sense, and also a plain doctrine of scripture, that blameworthiness is ever personal; and that a transfer of punishment from the guilty to the innocent—from the transgressor to one who has never transgressed, at least without the free consent of the latter, is a palpable violation of justice. How then can we be to blame, or justly liable to condemnation, for a rebellious act of Adam, committed thousands of years before we, personally, had existence?

Several ways have been taken to reconcile this idea of original sin with the justice of God. The most common way has been, by endeavoring to show that it was better, safer, and more likely to turn out well for us, to have Adam appointed the representative of the whole race, than for all men to have had a separate probation in innocency, each one for himself. Adam was as likely to persevere in perfect obedience through a space of trial as any of his posterity would have been; and in several respects much more likely. He entered upon the stage of action in full manhood: and he had more motives than any other man to awaken his constant caution, and to keep him from sinning. He knew, it is supposed, that the eternal happiness or misery of a numerous offspring was suspended upon his trial alone; which must be, in addition to his personal concern, a very powerful inducement to the utmost circumspection.

Now, if this were the likeliest plan to turn out advantageously for us; then, had we been in existence at the time, and had it been left to our choice, we should have chosen, if wise, to have Adam act for us, rather than to have run the greater risk of standing or falling, from our earliest infancy, each one for himself. And if it would have been wise in us to have chosen this, then it was no way injurious, but, on the contrary, kind and merciful in God, who had an undoubted right of choosing for us, to order our probation in this manner; namely, in Adam as our federal representative.

But still the question returns: How are *we to blame*, after all for *Adam's disobedience?* Another man may be more likely not to sin than I am; or a tree may be more likely to stand a number of years, than I should be to persevere so long in perfect holiness: but if that other man should sin, or if that tree should fall, is it my fault? Can I deserve to be punished for such a contingency, which it was not in my power to prevent? We do not, surely, connect the ideas of praise and blameworthiness, with a lucky or an unfortunate draught in a lottery. Kindness may be shown, and wisdom discovered, in giving one a favorable chance, or in putting one's interest upon a hopeful issue; but this has nothing to do with vindicating the righteousness, of considering and treating any one as a sinner, for an act not his own, or an event in which he had no activity. This solution does not appear satisfactory.

Another way to reconcile our being condemned for the offence of Adam, has therefore been attempted: namely, by having recourse to deep metaphysical researches, on the subject of personal identity. It has been said, the sameness of persons is not founded in nature; but merely in arbitrary divine constitution. That our present existence has no dependance on the past. That the preservation of men, and of every thing else, is really a new creation every moment. That no man is the same person now, that he was twenty years ago, or yesterday, for any other reason than because God hath so constituted. And therefore, if it be a divine constitution that Adam and all his posterity should be one, they are one and the same, to all personal intents and purposes. They are justly punishable for his disobedience; because it is in fact their disobedience, by reason of this constituted oneness, or sameness of person.

But this seems to be diving in metaphysics, below the bottom of things; or quite beyond the fathom of common sense. This is not to reconcile the doctrine

of original sin with our natural notions of justice: for it is foreign from all our natural notions entirely.

It may be objected to this notion of personal identity, that it leaves out what is evidently most essential to it; namely, personal *consciousness*. Every one is conscious of being the same person to-day, that he was yesterday, without ever hearing of such an arbitrary divine constitution: but no one can be conscious that he is the same person, that took and did eat of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden, nearly six thousand years ago; let him be told ever so often, that Adam and he have been constituted one and the same.

It may be objected, that, according to this way of reasoning, there can be no such thing as a man's knowing who he is, or who he is not. It can be known, at least, only from divine revelation: and how many unrevealed constitutions there may be, making two, or twenty, or thousands of men, one person, no man can tell. If it were true that one man's act might thus be made the act of another, by constituting them one person in law, we could have no kind of certainty whose sins we are answerable for, nor who may be answerable for those which we used to think our own. According to this, no one can know, from his own feelings, or from reason and the nature of things, that he is justly punishable for any thing he ever did; or that he is not justly punishable for all the evil deeds which have ever been done in the universe. This notion of unions of different men, making them one in law; and of thus transfering praise and blameworthiness from one to another, seems utterly inconsistent with the possibility of knowing what we deserve, or are to expect, let us be or do what we will: and therefore to be incompatible with all moral government, by promises and threatenings, rewards and punishments.

I must freely confess, after all the solutions which I have heard or read, or am able to invent, there

appears to me an insuperable difficulty in reconciling the strict imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, with any notions we have of justice. By a strict imputation in this case, I mean, judging them guilty of his eating the forbidden fruit; or condemning them for it, as though they had done it themselves. If the inspired scriptures are to be understood as teaching this doctrine, I must leave it, for the present, among the incomprehensibles of revealed religion.

But I am not certain that any passage of scripture must necessarily be so understood. The text we are now upon, appears to assert such an imputation, perhaps, the most expressly of any one in all the Bible. But possibly the meaning of this may only be; that by the fall of Adam, human nature became depraved: and that this depravity, and condemnation as the consequence, have descended from father to son ever since: and not that we are condemned for Adam's transgression, as if it had been our own act. It is said, *by*, not *for*, the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation. And *how* it came, is explained in the next verse. "For by one man's disobedience, many were *made sinners*." Not *constituted* sinners, without any fault of their own, or any thing sinful in themselves. That would be no advance from the foregoing assertion. It would be a mere tautology—a needless repetition of the same thing. To be constituted sinners by the disobedience of another, without being at all so personally considered; is nothing different from having condemnation come upon us for another's offence. Since, therefore, the apostle expresses himself in the form of argumentation, and of infering one thing from another, he cannot well be understood to assert that all men are condemned for Adam's offence; and then to add, as a proof or explanation of it, *For* they are constituted sinners, as guilty of his disobedience. It is natural to understand him as saying first in general,

t all men were some way brought into a state of ıdemnation by means of Adam's sin; and then as ing us more particularly how: namely, as hereby y became depraved and sinful creatures. Being his way made sinners, personally considered, of ırse, the judgment to condemnation comes upon m as such.

This, I apprehend, is the true scripture doctrine ›riginal sin. Sin comes to all men from Adam by ivation, in the first place; and not by a previous putation. All men are condemned as sinful themves; and not antecedently to their being so, for offence of another. Adam, (including Eve,) was original introducer of sin: "By one man sin end into the world;" and from him it hath descendto all men; and death, as the righteous conseıce. He begat a son in his own likeness, and t another in his; and so on in all succeeding gentions. All justly share in the same curse because are partakers of the same depravity. Yet, by the ning of death upon all men in this way, the infinite ınce given to God by the disobedience of our first ents, is manifested to this day, and will be to the l of the world: this being the source, the inlet, the mary cause, of such extensive and long continued n. It all comes as a token of the divine displeason account of the original apostacy; though it nes in this righteous order, the personal sin of h individual, before his punishment.

In no other way than this, do I believe, God ever icts misery on one, because of the sin of another. says indeed, as a reason enforcing the second ınmandment; "For I the Lord thy God am a ous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upthe children, unto the third and fourth generation hem that hate me." But by this we need not lerstand that he ever visits the children in his ıth, more than their own iniquities deserve. The vs in Babylon so construed former threatenings, it

seems, and supposed they were pining away in captivity, merely for the transgressions of their progenitors. Hence they used this proverb; "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge;" and hence they said, "The ways of the Lord are not equal." But the Most High tells them they misunderstood the matter; and he lays it down as the universal rule of his moral administration, "Every man shall die for his own sins." God may send calamities upon children, which he would not have sent upon them, had it not been for the iniquities of their ancestors. He may threaten parents with the ruin of their offspring, as the consequence of their idolatry, profaneness, lewdness, intemperance, or neglect of parental duties; and he may execute such threatenings. In this way, God's visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children is agreeable to his common Providence; and his threatening so to do may answer important purposes. It will have a powerful tendency to restrain parents from vice and negligence, unless they are without natural affection. But we are not to suppose that the children, in such cases, are ever miserable beyond the measure of their own demerit; or that they are any more sinful than they might justly have been left to be, if they had had the best of parents. Accordingly, it is sometimes seen that the most virtuous and pious persons have as abandoned, and as wretched children, as any in the world; which shows that this is a matter of divine sovereignty. It hence appears that children may be miserable without its being a punishment of them for their parents' sins; though wicked parents are often punished in the misery of their children.

In this way, and in no other that I know of, can we reconcile what God says of his visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, with his solemn declaration in Ezekiel, already mentioned; "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father," &c. The evident meaning of which declaration is, that no

one shall suffer evil, beyond his personal desert. This may be, and yet the sins of parents may occasion the sin and misery of children; provided the children are no more miserable, nor sinful, than they might have been left to be, had their parents been perfectly good.

In like manner, I conceive, the fall of Adam was the occasion of the fallen state, and condemnation, of all men. They would not have been in their present state of sin and misery, had it not been for his disobedience and offence. Yet they might, in the nature of things, without any unrighteousness in God, have been as depraved and wretched as they now are, had they been formed immediately out of the dust, and had there been no Adam.

If it be asked, How can it consist with the righteousness of God, to condemn men as being sinful from their birth, without the imputation of some antecedent sin?

I answer; just as well as it can be righteous for him to condemn one who has fallen into such a sinful state, after he had existed in innocence ever so long. God's leaving a creature to lose his virtue, or to become a sinner at first, can never be a matter of punishment. The difficulty in people's minds, now suggested, arises, I apprehend, from a wrong notion of what is necessary to constitute any one a sinner. They seem to imagine that he must have brought his first sinfulness upon himself, by some antecedent sin; or else it is not his own fault. But this is evidently an absurd and contradictory supposition. The first sin of any creature, must be the first; and cannot be the fruit or punishment of some former sin. We cannot suppose there was any sin committed by Adam, or imputed to him, previously to his first sin, and as the cause of his being first left to become sinful, without supposing a most palpable contradiction. And one who hath never done any thing amiss, though he may have lived an hundred years in the

perfect performance of every duty, no more deserves to be left of God to fall then into a state of sin and misery, than the child unborn, who has never done either good or evil. God hath an undoubted right to suffer innocent creatures to become sinners; and as good a right the first moment of their existence, as at any other time: and their first sin is *sin*—their *own* sin—their own *fault*, as much as any subsequent ones, and no more. If God were under obligation in justice to keep his creatures from falling, till after they had by sin, provoked him to leave them to themselves, there could be no possibility of their ever sinning, nor any such thing as a state of probation. They would necessarily, all of them be in a state of absolute confirmation in everlasting holiness and happiness, from the beginning of their existence. Or, if any of them should sin, it would be *God's* fault, and not *their's*. The probation would be of *Him;* not of *them.* But God hath seen fit, for wise reasons undoubtedly, to place angels and men in states of probation; and to suffer some of them to fall; and some into remediless perdition. He might, had that been most wise, have created all mankind at once, and put them all into a state of probation individually, as it is probable he did in regard to the angels. And he might have permitted them universally to fall, as he did some of the angels, and our first parents; nor would they, in that case, have had any reason to complain of unrighteous treatment. And why have we any more reason now, as God hath in fact ordered things? Now he hath seen fit to create at first only one man and one woman, to be the progenitors of all the rest of the human kind—to create them in perfect maturity of natural powers, and in perfect rectitude of disposition—to place them under as good external advantages for persevering obedience as could reasonably be desired; and to ordain that their probation should be instead of the probation of all men? That if they persevered and kept their virtue, through

the time appointed, all descending from them should be born in a state of confirmation, and be exposed to no further trial? That if they fell, all their descendants should be brought into existence in a fallen condition, like their's; depraved, inclined to sin, and, of consequence, under condemnation? What reason have we, their children, to complain of unrighteousness in being thus left, and thus condemned from our birth, any more than they had of being left as they were? or any more than we should have had, if we had been born holy, and had continued so twenty or an hundred years, and then had been left to become as sinful and miserable as we now are? Human nature has had a fair trial, in its most perfect state. We know, or might know, that had we been tried in innocence as Adam and Eve were, and been left as they were left, we should have sinned and fell as they did. All the ends of the trial of innocent human nature, on a constitution requiring sinless perseverance as the condition of life, are sufficiently answered by the trial of our first parents. Wisdom requires no more. And in point of justice, what can be the objection? The time and manner of the probation of creatures, and even whether they be in a state of probation at all, are matters of wise sovereignty only. All that justice requires, is that the innocent should not be condemned, nor the wicked justified. We are not condemned being innocent. We were born sinners; we were conceived sinners; and as such only are we condemned. We did not make ourselves sinners, it is true, by any bad conduct before we were inclined to sin: but no more did Adam. He was condemned only for being a sinner, and for committing sin; and just so is every one of us. Only as, according to a divine constitution founded in sovereign wisdom entirely, the trial of human nature in innocence was in Adam alone, (either including or exclusively of Eve;) so it may with propriety be said, "By the offence of one, judgment came upon

all men to condemnation:" as, had he persevered in obedience, the justification of life would have come upon all on account of his righteousness. But, as in that case, none besides the personally innocent would have been justified; so, in the present case, none but personal sinners are condemned.

Certainly, we have but a miserable plea for the arrest of judgment, in point of justice, if we cannot plead personal innocence; but only object to the manner of our becoming sinners. Sin, is in itself sinful. If we have inherent sin, let it come by derivation from Adam, or how it will, our condemnation is just.

Should any say, It is impossible that we should be born in sin, otherwise than by imputation; unless we suppose a pre-existence of souls. That there cannot be personal sin in any one till there is knowledge of law and duty, or of right and wrong: but of this, a new-born infant is certainly incapable.

I answer; The objector takes for granted, that there can be no such thing as depravity of *nature*, an evil *temper*, or a wicked *heart*, prior to the actual commission of sin. But this is not sufficiently self-evident to be assumed as a principle which needs no proof. On the contrary, it is agreeable to common sense, and seems plainly supposed in several texts and doctrines of scripture, that depravity of nature must be antecedent to all sinful actions, and the cause of them. But if so, there may be a wicked heart prior to knowledge. There may be a propensity to sinful actions in a child, before it is come to years to choose the evil, and refuse the good. This may be in us, as early as we have human souls.

There is the same impossibility of original righteousness, as of original sin, on the principle of the present objection. Created holiness must be prior to knowledge and volition, as much as native sin. Yet Moses says man was created in the image of God. Solomon lays it down as a certain truth,

"That God made man upright." And the apostle Paul speaks of a "new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Both the first and second creation unto good works, spoken of in scripture, necessarily suppose that there may be holiness in man, prior to his having any actual perception or exercises; and why not sin, as well, prior to all acts of sin.

It may be said, If men are born depraved, the Author of their nature must be the Creator of their depravity.

But, perhaps this need not be supposed. Perhaps the depravity of a sinner may consist, primarily, in mere privation; or in the want of holy principles: and if so, it need not be created. But if sin must be, at bottom, something positive, it will require creation in an adult, as much as in an embryo: this, therefore, is not a difficulty at all peculiar to the doctrine of native depravity.

Some may think, that to condemn a creature for an unholy temper of mind, before he has done either good or evil, is as difficult to reconcile with justice, as the condemnation of all men for the sin of Adam.

But, Why should it be thought unjust that one should be condemned for depravity of nature only, any more than that he should be condemned for acts of wickedness, which will be the necessary consequence of such depravity, as soon as opportunity is given? Our Saviour says, "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." And in Isaiah it is said, "The vile person will speak villainy, and his heart will work iniquity." Why should the totally depraved sinner be condemned for not acting in a holy manner, or for acting wickedly? You will say, Because he might do otherwise, if he would. Very true; but he cannot will to act well, or not to act ill, as long as he is altogether of a sinful disposition. The only reason that men are blameworthy for evil actions, which are done under a kind of absolute ne-

cessity, is, a depraved temper of mind, which is all the cause of that necessity, is blameable in itself. If a wicked heart were not in itself sinful, none of the thoughts, or words, or deeds, which necessarily flow from that fountain, would be a man's own fault. Were not an ungovernable inclination to iniquity, criminal in its own nature, it would excuse whatever it necessarily occasions, as much as any other innocent cause does, its unavoidable effects. But if a depraved disposition be a moral evil—a culpable thing, then he who hath it, may justly be condemned for it, before he has time to act at all.

If any should say, We know nothing what either a good or a wicked heart is, before, or distinct from, all volitions and exercises; and have therefore no reason to think there is, or can be, any such thing.

To this it may be answered; We know as well what a good or bad disposition is, prior to virtuous or vicious exercises, as we do what reason is, prior to rational actions: as well as we know what a human soul is, prior to the operations of it; and as well as we know what God is, distinct from his works. No unseen cause, can be known from seen effects, any better than the disposition of a man may be known from his words and actions. We may just as well disbelieve that there is a spirit in man, or a God that governs the world, as that there is any such thing as a wicked or good heart. As well as the invisible things of God, can be learnt from the things which are made; and as well as we know that God *is* good, because he *does* good; just so well do we know that he who *committeth* sin, hath a sinful *disposition*. There may be good nature, or ill nature; a holy or an unholy temper of mind, in a man when he is in the most profound sleep; and is as unknowing and inactive as an unborn infant. If it be otherwise; if the good man loses all his virtues, and the bad man all his vices, whenever they fall asleep, why do they so constantly recover them again, and act in

character, as soon as they awake? If there be *no* difference between a good and a wicked man, till they come actually to understand and choose, what is the reason that, with the same objective light and motives set before them, they constantly understand and choose so very differently? Whence is it that to the renewed, Christ is altogether lovely; while to the unregenerate, he hath no form nor comeliness, and when they *see* him, there is no beauty that they can desire him? Whence is it that, with equal natural capacities and speculative knowledge, the saint chooses the way of God's commandments, the sinner the way of transgression? Certainly, there must be a difference *in the men*: a difference in their *dispositions*; a difference *previously* to these different perceptions and volitions.

And if *we* know not what the dispositions of men are, or that they have any, till they have opportunity to act them out, the Judge of all the earth knows. He searcheth the heart and trieth the reins. "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed." Weighed perfectly, because he fully sees all their principles, or want of principles.

By way of improvement;

1. We may hence learn, in what sense repenting of original sin, is essential to true repentance.

Some serious persons are greatly troubled, because they cannot feel themselves to blame for Adam's first sin; which they have been taught to believe is imputed to them, and is really their own sin. If such are convinced of the truth of what has now been said, they may hence be comforted in this particular. God requires no such impossibility of us, as blaming ourselves for any one's faults but our own. To feel guilty of Adam's eating the forbidden fruit, is naturally impossible. The renewed, I am confident, can no more have such repentance, than the unrenewed.

To a good man, it may be matter of humiliation, that the father of his flesh, from whom he originally descended, was guilty of so great an offence. But a consciousness of having been to blame, or a sense of self-condemnation, for the disobedience of Adam, or of Eve, whatever some may have worked themselves up to an imagination of, I am persuaded is what no person, except our first parents themselves, ever really felt, or can possibly feel.

Yet, let us not think our repentance has been unto salvation, unless we have seen and felt that we deserve the wrath and curse of God, on account of the sinfulness of our hearts, as well as the iniquities of our lives. Unless, for not loving God and our neighbor, and for all our ungodly and unrighteous propensities thence arising, we abhor and condemn ourselves. In this sense of original sin, repenting of it is essential to true repentance.

2. We may hence see that Adam was not so much more inexcusable than other sinners, as seems often to be imagined; and that *our* sins are not so imputable to *him*, as to be of any avail to us.

Some, there is reason to fear, are fond of the doctrine of original sin, because, as they understand the matter, it gives them much ease and comfort. Adam, they think, was a great sinner indeed, because he was not in a fallen state, but sinned before he had any depravity of nature: before he had the least inclination to sin. Whereas, in consequence of his offence, they are now so depraved from the very birth, that they sin naturally and unavoidably: and therefore, are not much to be blamed for sinning. It seems to them as if it were a most abominable thing to sin with an honest and good heart; but no evil at all, provided it be done with a wicked mind! But, surely such turning of things up side down, shall be esteemed as the potter's clay. Such reasonings to cover the nakedness of our criminality, are worse than the

fig-leaves of our first parents. It is placing sin in innocence, and innocence in sin.

3. We may hence be convinced, that God was under no obligation to save lost men, because of the manner of their being brought into a state of sin and misery.

A late author in favor of the doctrine of universal salvation, makes much use of this argument, and labors hard to support it by scripture, as well as reason. He explains several texts in the New-Testament so as to make them say, that men were condemned, before they deserved condemnation. Rom. v. 12, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," he paraphrases thus: "Death passed upon all men, *whereupon*; in consequence of which, all have sinned." And indeed, if that were the case, they might all well be angry; and they must be meeker than Moses, not to sin. Of the eighth chapter of Romans, 20th ver. "The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope," he supposes the meaning to be; "That mankind were doomed to all the infelicities of this life, not for any fault of their own; but in the sure and certain hope before given, in the sentence passed upon the serpent, that they should all, sooner or later, be delivered from the ruins of the apostacy, and be for ever happy." Whence he infers, as well he might were the premises true, that, "If any of mankind should not be saved, they would have reason to complain."

And many others, who do not carry the matter quite so far, feel themselves obliged, in like manner, to bring in all the grace of the gospel, that the law may be made just, by which we stand condemned. But, according to what has now been said there was no need of such infinite grace, only to mend a bad law.

The original constitution, taken by itself, was holy and just: no man being doomed by it to death, or subjected to the infelicities of this life, but for his own fault. Consequently, all might justly have been left to perish, without a Saviour, and without a Sanctifier; and God may justly have mercy on whom he will have mercy.

Let sinners, then, instead of saying, "The ways of the Lord are not equal," look into themselves: and wherein their own ways have been unequal, or their hearts have not been good, let them abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes. And let saints, who have been recovered from the error of their ways to the wisdom of the just, ascribe the whole of their salvation to free and rich grace. Remember, my redeemed and renewed hearers; "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

SERMON XII.

ON THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF MANKIND BY NATURE.

ROMANS VII. 18.

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.

THE knowledge of ourselves, is of the nearest concernment to us; more especially the knowledge of our moral character, and spiritual condition. Other knowledge may be useful, respecting the life that now is; but this is necessary, in regard to that which is to come. This, therefore, is an essential part of that wisdom which is the principal thing. The greatest naturalist, geographer, astronomer, or politician, if he lives and dies a stranger to himself, and never knows the state he is in, or what manner of spirit he is of, it may be truly said of him, that he lives and dies a fool.

And as self-knowledge is of the greatest importance to us, so, one would think, it were of the easiest acquisition. But yet the truth too evidently is, that in this branch of science, we are apt to be most remarkably deficient. Those who can discern the least mote in a neighbor's eye, are often insensible of a beam in their own. Those who carry their in-

vestigations through the remotest ages of antiquity, and to the most distant regions of the earth, are often great strangers at home, and amazingly ignorant respecting themselves. This can be resolved only into selfish partiality, and an extreme reluctance to come to the light, when we are afraid it would reprove and condemn us. Hence many, all their days, flatter themselves that they are rich and increased with goods, when really they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

The apostle Paul himself, was once in this state of ignorance and self-deception. He is giving an account in our context, of the high ideas he had formerly entertained of his pharisaical righteousness; of the causes of those wrong apprehensions; and of the means by which he was brought to alter them, and forced to admit the mortifying conviction of his exceeding vileness. "I was alive without the law once," says he, ver. 5, "but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." He goes on to relate the further experimental knowledge which had been given him, of what he still was, as well as of what he had been before his conversion. "For we know that the law is spiritual," says he, "but I am carnal, sold under sin.—I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And in the midst of these humiliating confessions and bitter complaints, he expresses himself in the words of our text: "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing."

Supposing that this description of himself is equally a true one of other men; we will briefly inquire

how it is to be understood; and then consider the evidence we have of its truth, as applicable to all mankind.

I. I shall endeavor to explain, briefly, how Paul is here to be understood; that in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelt no good thing.

What the apostle means by his flesh, may be learnt from his repeated use of that expression. In ver. 5, of the context, he says, "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sin did work in our members." And ver. 8, of the next chapter, "So then they that are in the flesh, cannot please God." In both which places, by being in the flesh, is plainly meant, being in a state of unrenewed nature. In Gal. v. 17, he says, "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." There, by flesh, we are to understand, the remainder of corrupt nature in good men. And ver. 19—23, the contrary operations of the flesh, and effects of the spirit, are particularly described. "Now, the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, laciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, &c. But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance." By flesh and spirit cannot be here meant, the body and soul: for several of the sins enumerated have not their origin or seat in the body, any more than all sins have: and the virtues mentioned are not the fruits of every human soul; but of the Divine Spirit, where he operates in a sanctifying manner. Or they are the fruits of that new nature in man, which is begun in regeneration. By the flesh, then, we are to understand the sinful nature derived from Adam—the old man which is corrupt.

So that when in our text the apostle says, "In me, that is, in my flesh;" he means in him by na-

ture: or so far as he was yet unsanctified, by divine grace.

When he says there was thus in him *no good thing*, his meaning is, nothing *spiritually* good. Not that he was destitute of every natural excellency. This, certainly, is not the case with fallen man, as born of the flesh. The unregenerate have good things of these kinds. They may have good features, shapes, and limbs: they may have good understandings, good inventions, and good memories; as good as those who have been born again.

Nor is it to be understood that mankind by nature have nothing humane or sociable in their dispositions; nothing of those partial, friendly propensities, which, in a limited sphere, answer good purposes; and which, to our short-sighted, superficial view, appear amiable. The unrenewed are not, all of them, without natural affection, nor wholly destitute of compassion for one another in distress and misery. Sometimes they are kind parents, dutiful children, and tender husbands and wives; and some of them have a great deal of what we call, general good nature. There are such instincts as these, perhaps not originating merely from self-love, which most men, more or less, plainly discover.

But, the meaning of the apostle, I conceive, is simply this: That in him, as far as he remained unsanctified, or as he was by nature, there were no principles of real godliness or virtue—no inclinations to that love of God and his neighbors, on which hang all the law and the prophets—not a single living branch or root, of disinterested, universal goodness.

Unless, therefore, Paul, in his native character and state, was essentially different from other men, we have in these words of his, the doctrine of man's total depravity by nature; as consisting in the entire want of righteousness and true holiness.

We will now, as was proposed,

II. Consider whether we have not other plain and full proofs of this doctrine.

That the heart of the sons of men is very full of evil, is what no one can well dispute: their abominable works—their biting, and devouring, and slaughtering one another; and the wretched state of all nations ever since the fall, notwithstanding all the methods taken to restrain the lusts of men, make this undeniably evident. But that there is nothing truly virtuous in man by nature, may not perhaps be so readily admitted, nor so easily proved. Our principal light respecting this point, must be derived from scripture. Experience and observation may not furnish arguments universally satisfactory, one way or the other. Some may be fully convinced, by their own experience, that they themselves were thus totally depraved: but their testimony may not convince others, who have had no such experience, that all natural men are so very wicked. Some, on the other side, may imagine it is abundantly evident from observation, that mankind, though very bad in many instances, have not lost all their virtue; besure as they are by nature, uncontaminated by evil communications. But it is so uncertain to us who are in a state of nature, and there are so many lower instincts, and so many selfish principles, from which the specious actions of men may proceed, that no infallible conclusion can be grounded on this kind of evidence. Let us then candidly inquire, "What saith the scripture?" Here,

1. There are several texts which seem expressly to assert, or plainly to imply, that the native condition of fallen man, is such a state of total moral depravity as hath now been explained.

I shall refer you to only a few of these. It is said, Gen. vi. 5, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart, was only evil continually." This was soon after men began to multiply; and there is no reason to think that the world was then more wicked than it has been since. It is said again in the fourteenth Psalm; "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." And this the apostle quotes, Rom. iii. 11, 12; adding, other passages of the Old Testament, in further proof of the total, as well as universal depravity of men; "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes." And to the Ephesians, most of whom had been heathen, he says; "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature children of wrath even as others." And our Saviour says, John iii. 6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." so totally flesh, that is, corrupt and sinful, as to be incapable of entering into the kingdom of God, by embracing the gospel of his grace.

2. We are plainly taught the total depravity of fallen man, by what is said concerning the necessity

of regeneration, or the renewing of the Holy Ghost. This change is spoken of as necessary in order to good works; and as that without which no one can see the kingdom of God. And it is set forth by such phrases as these: being born again; having a new heart given us, and a new spirit put within us; being quickened, or brought to life, when dead; and being created after God, in allusion to the first creation of man in the likeness of his Maker. All which strong modes of expression evidently imply, that man by the fall is become totally depraved. If the unrenewed heart were but partly sinful, it might be mended; and there would be no need of a new heart. If the old spirit were not wholly unholy, there would be no occasion for giving a new spirit. If there were any spiritual life in men they would not need quickening by the mighty power of God, in a manner as supernatural as the raising of Christ from the dead. If man had the root of the matter in him, or the seeds of virtue, by his first birth, there would be no necessity of his being born again. If we were by nature at all inclined to that which is good, or had any thing of that moral image of our Maker in which the first man was made; there would be no need of a new creation after God in righteousness and true holiness, or of our being created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

All the forementioned representations of this necessary renewing of the Holy Ghost, are plainly designed to teach us, that it is a change of nature—the production of something specifically new in the soul of man—the beginning of a clean heart, or a right spirit: and therefore they evidently imply, that previously to it, there is a total destitution of every thing of this kind.

3. This is also very evident, from the certain marks, or distinguishing characteristics of a good man, which we often find in the holy scriptures.

Right exercises or dispositions, in any degree, are spoken of as things which accompany salvation, and as infallible evidences of a state of grace. See Matt. v. 3—8, "Blessed are the poor in spirit:—Blessed are they that mourn:—Blessed are the meek:—Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:—Blessed are the merciful:—Blessed are the pure in heart:"—See also 1 John iii. 14, "We know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." And chap. iv. ver. 7, "Every one that loveth is born of God."

In these texts, you may observe, the degree of the several graces or virtues spoken of is not mentioned. It is not said how poor in spirit men must be, to make it evident that their's is the kingdom of heaven: or how much they must mourn, before it is certain that they shall be comforted: or how meek they must be, to enjoy the earth as a divine patrimonial inheritance: or how merciful, that they may expect divine mercy: or how ardently they must desire righteousness, before the promise of being filled belongs to them: or how pure in heart those are, who shall hereafter enjoy the beatific vision of God. Nor is it said what degree of brotherly kindness and charity we must have, to know that we have passed from death to life, or that we are born of God. But it is left in such a manner as must necessarily lead us to suppose, that if one can be certain he has these virtues or graces, though in the lowest degree, he may be certain that he shall inherit the promises, and is an heir of glory. But this could not be true, if there were these good things in men, in any measure, while unbelievers, and unrenewed. If the natural man were not altogether destitute of these truly virtuous dispositions and affections, they could be no discriminating marks of the adopted children of God, or evidences of one's being in a state of grace.

Thus, you see, the Bible expressly asserts, and abundantly supposes, that man by nature is totally

depraved; that is, wholly destitute of true holiness. And what need have we of further witness? God knows what is in man. His eye searcheth the very bottom of the heart; and He is a God of truth. If, therefore, we have his word, and in that are told there dwelleth no good thing in man by nature, as our Saviour told the unbelieving Jews, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you," it must be true.

With regard to human authorities, or the opinions of men, it may be observed, that no great stress is to be laid upon them in matters of religion; more especially in the present question, which respects their own character. If mankind think mankind virtuous, it is no great evidence that they are really so. They bear witness for themselves; and such witness is never admitted as of much weight. "Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness;" though a faithful man is hardly to be found.

It is to be observed, however, that even on this question, wherein men must be very partial witnesses, their witness agreeth not together. Many deny the doctrine of man's total depravity by nature, and strenuously dispute against it: but by many it is acknowledged and maintained. And many who oppose it, still admit, and appeal to men's feelings for the truth of, what plainly implies it; namely, that self-love is the bottom spring of all human actions. An author of considerable fame,* two volumes of whose sermons we have in our public library, says, in one of them; "If we closely attend to the operations of our own minds, and carefully observe what passeth within us, at that very instant when we are doing a charitable and friendly action, I am apt to think we shall find that the pleasure which results from it arises, either from a sense that what we are doing may procure us the approbation of men; or it

* Seed.

proceeds from a sense of having done our duty, and so recommended ourselves to the favor of God.—That pleasure which is annexed to any generous and worthy deed, may be compared to its opposite; namely, that remorse which is consequent to wickedness. And it may be questioned whether we should have any, or at least any permanent remorse, after having committed an ill action, if we were sure we could fence off all ill consequences, and neither be exposed to the scorn and hatred of the world, nor draw upon ourselves the divine vengeance. Just so it may admit of a dispute, whether the pleasure we are speaking of would not vanish, if we apprehended that mankind would neither commend and esteem us, nor the Deity reward us for our goodness." In another place the same author says, "The only things which influence our practice, are considerations which call forth the workings of self-love, that first great wheel of the soul, to which all the rest move in subordination."

A great part of our moral philosophers, and Arminian divines generally, are in the same sentiment. They conceive virtue to be a mere selfish thing: only a well regulated regard to one's personal interest. And the Antinomians, in all their different ways of explaining themselves, consider all religion as nothing else. They suppose that what converts a sinner, and what excites the love of God in a saint, is only a belief of his love to them, in particular, or to mankind in general; thus making all religious affections turn upon the *first great wheel of self-love.*

Now these, I reckon some of the strongest human testimonies we could have, in proof of the total moral depravity of mankind by nature. From their own feelings, and from their observation of others, they are forced into the conclusion that man is a totally selfish creature. But we need not suppose the worst man on earth, or devil in hell, more depraved in the

bottom of his heart, than to have no ultimate regard to any one's honor or happiness, but his own.

We may further take notice, that those advocates for native human virtues, who do not adopt the selfish system, suppose things virtuous, which are not of the nature of christian virtue, or true holiness. Such, for instance, as the love of one's country; the tenderness between the sexes; the affection of parents for their children, and natural compassion for the miserable.

Respecting these, I observe, that several of them may proceed from mere self-love; but that, if there be somewhat of disinterestedness in any of them, yet, because of their want of universality and impartiality, they can never produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness, or be the fulfilling of the divine law. On the contrary, transgression, and the grossest iniquities, are their natural tendency and common effects. This is the case, particularly in regard to the love between the sexes, parental fondness, and that patriotism which has been so much the boast of Pagans, and of many who are called christians. These are among those lusts of men which war in their members, whence come wars and fightings; envying and strife, confusion and all manner of evil works. All partial benevolence, like self-love, will naturally produce enmity toward those who are without the limited sphere of its friendly operation.

As to that natural compassion for the miserable, which operates more extensively: this is too limited in another view, to have a tendency to universal happiness, or to be of the nature of righteousness and true holiness. Persons most remarkable for this, are frequently as remarkable for many vicious tempers and practices, hurtful to others, as well as to themselves. They are often, not only irreligious and profane, but intemperate, lewd, envious, revengeful, false, fraudulent and unjust. As common family affection, and love of one's country, will not

influence to the whole duty of man, because they embrace only a part of mankind, and have no respect to God: so this natural humanity will not, because it is felt for no individual, only in a partial view, and under particular circumstances. The man whose heart is easily touched with tender sensibility for a neighbor in extreme distress, would be grieved as much, perhaps, to see that same neighbor more prosperous and happy than himself. Nor is it every kind of suffering, however great, that will move the compassion of these good natured, wicked men. The sight of one wounded, bleeding and half dead, powerfully excites their commisseration; but to see or hear the good name of the most worthy person, mangled and torn in pieces, by the tongue or pen of malice and falsehood, gives them pleasure, very often, instead of any resentment or uneasiness.

This partial, common compassion, appears to be nothing more than a mere animal instinct; similar to what we observe in most kinds of the inferior creation. As far as it goes, it is a good thing, as rain and sunshine are good. It answers good purposes in the present wretched state of man, but is not at all adapted to that world of happiness where are no objects of pity, and where millions will be seen exalted in felicity and glory far higher than ourselves. Notwithstanding all such humanity, we must be born again, before we can see the kingdom of God. We must have a more uniform good nature, or we can never be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. We must have a better principle of good works created in us, before we can do any thing that will be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

There is one way more, which I will just mention, whence some may be led to think human nature virtuous, when really it is not. They may mistake a rightly dictating conscience, for a good disposition. There is undoubtedly in natural men, not only reason, which enables them to judge, but

also a moral sense, whereby they feel, of themselves what is right. This is that of which the apostle speaks, Rom. ii. 14, 15, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the works of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another."

Man, in a state of nature, has something in him besides reason—something in his breast, as well as in his head, which bears witness in favor of truth, justice, and goodness: which always gives a verdict, when cases are fairly understood, on the side of the eternal rule of right: which approves what is morally good, and condemns what is morally evil. This some have called the moral sense; and is what the Bible calls conscience. But this is a different thing from a disposition to refuse the evil, and choose the good. It is not the public sense, or universal benevolence of heart; which inclines a man to the practice of whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. If there be any virtue, or any thing worthy of praise as proceeding from, or comprehended in, an honest and good heart, this is not the thing. It is found in the worst of all rational beings. It will be the worm that never dies, gnawing the souls of all the wicked in hell, with everlasting shame and self-condemnation.

Let us now apply and improve this whole subject, for our further learning and profit.

1. We may hence learn why it is that good thoughts and impressions are apt to be so transient and unabiding in natural men. Vain thoughts—trifling, foolish, wicked thoughts, *lodge* within them. But it is not so in regard to good thoughts, or thoughts of things that are good. If these obtrude

themselves at any time, (like troublesome beggars at our doors,) they are treated with great coldness and neglect. It may be said to them, "Depart in peace; be warmed, be filled:" or a pittance of some poor thing may be given them, just to silence their clamorous importunity; but they are dismissed as soon as possible. It is the same case, generally, respecting any serious purposes and resolutions of sinners. Thus Ephraim's goodness, it is said, was as a morning cloud, and as the early dew, it went away. This is represented by our Saviour, in his parable of the sower: "Some seed fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up it withered away, because it lacked moisture."

2. Hence let not any think that their depravity is not great, or not very criminal; if it be only the want of good principles: principles so very good, as the disinterested love of God, and of all their fellow-creatures. The worst creature on earth, or in hell, need not be supposed any more depraved than this, in the bottom of his heart. This alone, in a moral agent, who has self-love, and its subservient appetites and passions, will account for all ungodliness and unrighteousness, in thought, word and deed. Let men have no disposition to glorify, or desire to enjoy God, and they will naturally be enemies to him in their minds; they will hate his laws, and murmur against his Providence and grace; and it will be the latent wish of their heart to have no God. Let men be lovers of none but their own selves, and they will be "covetous, boasters, proud, disobedient to parents, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded." As far as they are not restrained by the fear of punishment, a regard to reputation, or some other selfish or partial motive, they will be full of all unrighteousness and iniquity. Their throat will be an open sepulchre; with their tongues they will use

deceit; the poison of asps will be under their lips; their mouth will be full of cursing and bitterness; their feet will be swift to shed blood. Let a sinner only know this plague of his own heart, the want of all good principles, and he will see cause enough for self-reproach and self-abhorrence.

3. It hence appears that such as hope they are christians, had need be very cautious and thorough in self-examination. Many are the ways in which men may experience a superficial conversion, and seem to be religious, when all, at bottom, is nothing but self-love. There is also great danger of mistaking conscience, for a good heart; or natural compassion, and other partial kind affections, for that love which is the fulfilling of the law—that charity which is the bond of perfectness. By these means, undoubtedly, multitudes are deceived; thinking themselves something, when they are nothing. And for these reasons, it greatly concerns supposed converts, again and again, to examine and prove their own selves.

4. Christians, the most assured and best of them, should hence be led to adore the sovereignty of divine grace; and to walk humbly with God, and meekly among their fellow-men. To this purpose, I shall conclude with the words of Paul to Titus: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness to all men. For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God appeared; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

SERMON XIII.

ON MAN'S NATIVE OPPOSITION OF HEART, TO THE SUPREME BEING.

ROMANS VIII. 7.

The carnal mind is enmity against God.

THAT mankind may be brought to a compliance with the proposals and terms of the gospel, a deep conviction of sin, as well as misery, is altogether necessary. In vain are any called upon to repent, or receive an offered Saviour, before they are sensible that they are sinners. In vain do we persuade men to be reconciled to God, as long as they see not that they are in a state of irreconciliation.

Many have little apprehension of the evil of their ways: when, therefore, the gospel is preached to them, they make light of it, and pay little attention to it. Others, though they have some conviction of their external sins, and feel some concern what they shall do to be saved; yet perceive not the desperate wickedness of their hearts, and hence their hurt is healed slightly, by a superficial amendment. In order to a true repentance and turning to God, a sinner must know, as Solomon expresses it, "the plague of his own heart." Nor is a conviction of one's

total want of true holiness, all that is necessary to answer every important purpose. It is said, "The heart of the sons of men is *full of evil;*" and perceiving this, as well as that in it there dwelleth no good thing, is useful, if not absolutely requisite, that a sinner may have a proper sense of his need of gospel grace.

The apostle, in the words now to be insisted on, asserts the extreme positive wickedness of the heart of fallen man, in very strong and striking terms. In discoursing upon this subject, it is proposed to show:

I. What we are here to understand by the carnal mind.

II. What is meant by its being enmity against God.

III. What other evidence we have that it is really so: and,

IV. What is the cause of this enmity; or how it can rationally be accounted for.

By the carnal mind, I conceive, the apostle means, the mind of the natural man: the mind which all men are of, until, in the language of our Saviour, they are born again. The word *carnal*, it is true, signifies the same as *fleshly*. Carnal is opposed to spiritual, as flesh is opposed to spirit. And by the word flesh, when applied to man, we sometimes mean the body, in distinction from the soul. Whence, perhaps, some might be ready to think, that by *the carnal mind*, is most naturally to be understood, a mind that is uncommonly under the dominion of bodily appetites. The mind of a glutton, a drunkard, or of one abandoned to lewdness. But from the frequent use of similar phrases and expressions in scripture, and even from the passage in connection with our text itself, it may well be

concluded, that nothing more worse is here meant, than the mind of every unregenerate sinner. By *the flesh*, in the New-Testament, is very frequently intended, the whole man, as he is by natural generation. Our Saviour, having observed to Nicodemus, that, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" to explain himslf, and to give the reason of the necessity of this second birth, he says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." And all sorts of sins are called works of the flesh. "Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, and heresies, are so called, Gal. v. 20, as well as drunkenness and uncleanness. By the flesh, in these places, must necessarily be understood, "the old man which is corrupt;" and by the spirit, "the new man, which is created after God in righteousness and true holiness." In the same manner the words flesh and spirit, carnal and spiritual, are evidently used in the context, both before our text and after it. The apostle had said, ver. 1, "There is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." And ver. 5, 6, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." He then adds, ver. 7, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." And he goes on to say, ver. 8, 9, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." He is manifestly describing the essential difference, in temper and state, between the regenerate and the unregenerate; and it is plain from the whole passage, that by the carnal mind is meant, the mind of the natural man—the mind of all the sons and daughters of Adam, except such as have been

"saved by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

II. What we are to understand by the carnal mind's being enmity against God, is next to be explained.

I suppose the apostle means by this, that the heart of an unregenerate sinner, is utterly opposed to the holy nature and ways, of the Creator and Lord of all. More particularly,

1. This enmity of the carnal mind against God implies, the reverse of a love of complacency in him. This is a truth, at least, plainly taught in scripture, and which many have known, respecting themselves, by experience. Concerning the hypocrite, Job says, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" which question strongly imports the certainty that he will not; and that none but the sincere saint will do this. Good men take delight in contemplating the perfections and Providence of God. They rejoice that "the Lord reigneth;" and that he is infinitely just and wise, as well as good and merciful. But with the wicked—with all the unrenewed, it is quite the reverse. They hate to think of the holiness and justice, the omniscience and omnipotence, of the Supreme Being. If they believe these his attributes, and his righteous, universal Providence, they take no delight in that belief; but it excites in them displeasure and uneasiness.

2. This enmity of the carnal mind against God implies, and most directly means, the reverse of a love of benevolence towards him. Wicked men are not the hearty friends of God; but are enemies to him in their minds. We may dislike those to whom we are not enemies. Enmity is something more than dislike. It is that kind of hatred which is known by the name of ill will: and it is he that hateth his

brother in this sense only, who is said to be a murderer. To be an enemy to any one, is to wish him ill, and to be disposed to do him hurt; as being a friend to one, on the contrary, is to wish well to him, and to be ready, when it is in our power, to do him good. God is indeed above the possibility of sustaining damage, or receiving benefit, from any thing we do: nevertheless, we may have the same disposition and feelings toward him, that we have toward our fellow-creatures, who are within the reach of our good or ill offices. In our minds, we may be friends or enemies to him, as well as to one another. We may wish that his name might be hallowed: that his kingdom might come, and his will be done; or we may wish the contrary. We may be ready to do what in us lies to promote, or to prevent, the advancement of his declarative glory. The revival of his work may give us joy, or it may excite our displeasure and grief. Moses and Joshua were exceedingly concerned for the honor of God's great name; and David wanted to have the whole creation unite in praising the Lord. Were not these the natural exercises and expressions of a friendly disposition to the Supreme Being? The devil, on the contrary, is extremely unwilling that God should be glorified; and would make the whole intelligent creation revolt from him, and blaspheme his holy name, if it were in his power. What is this but to be at heart a perfect enemy to God? The enmity of the carnal mind of fallen man is of the same nature, though not to the same degree. Those who are enemies to God in their minds, will be ready to dispute his sovereignty, to plead for independence on him, and to act in opposition to his revealed will. In proportion as we have enmity in our hearts against God, we do not love that he should be so highly exalted, and possess such absolute dominion and power: and we are disposed to speak and act, not for him, but against him; and to take pleasure in

the society of those who dishonor his name, rather than in that of them who show forth his praise.

3. It is to be particularly observed, that the manner of expression in our text, seems to suppose this native unfriendliness of the human heart, to the holy Sovereign of the universe, to be total and entire. It is not merely asserted that the carnal mind has much in it which is inimical to God. This might consist with its having something in it of sincere friendliness to him. This might be truly said of the best of men in this world of imperfection. The apostle Paul himself found a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind; and undoubtedly that remaining fleshly law, warred against the law of God, and against the love of God. But to have the mind enmity itself against him, is something much more than this. It implies that the heart has nothing in it of the love of God, but is in total opposition to him.

III. We proceed to consider what other evidence there is of its being true, that all men by nature are so very ungodly and ill disposed.

The proof of it doth not rest merely on this one text. If it did, there might perhaps be some reason to hope that the expressions here were hyperbolical; or that they did not necessarily imply so much as hath now been supposed. But that this is no exaggerated representation of the ungodliness of fallen men, however we should wish not to believe it, is evident abundantly from other passages of scripture, and from facts, which cannot be disputed.

1. The enmity of the mind of man against God, is manifest from what we read and see of the unbelief of mankind, with respect to his being and perfections. David says, Psal. xiv. 1, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." Or, rather, our English translators have supposed this to be his

meaning: for in the Hebrew of that text, the words are only these; "The fool hath said in his heart, No God." And some have thought the supplement, *there is*, to be improper or needless. That the psalmist meant to say what was the fool's secret wish; not what was his inward belief. By the fool, is commonly meant in scripture, not an idiot, but a sinner, in contradistinction to a saint; or, in the language of the New-Testament, the natural man. And that the psalmist is so to be understood in this text, is plain from what immediately follows: "They are corrupt; they have done abominable works; there is none that doeth good. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." He is plainly giving the character of all mankind by nature; and if he meant that it was the language of man's heart, "No God," or, Let there be no such being, then we have in this text an express assertion, that natural men are of a disposition which is enmity to the existence of God. But if the psalmist be understood, agreeably to our translation, as only asserting the inward atheism of wicked men, or their unbelief that there is a God, still this proves the enmity of the human heart against him: for to no other cause can such atheistical unbelief be ascribed; since we may as easily know that all things must have been made at first, and that the Maker of them must be God, as that every house was builded by some man. Yet it is very manifest from the conduct of a great part of mankind, even under the light of the gospel, that they have no real belief of the existence of God.

2. From the so early and so universal prevalence, of the most stupid and abominable idolatry in this

fallen world, the enmity of the human heart against the Supreme Being, is exceedingly evident.

The apostle hence proves the extreme ungodliness of the heathen Gentiles, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans. He says, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things." This he imputes, not to their wanting the necessary means of coming to the knowledge of the truth; but to their holding the truth in unrighteousness—to their not being disposed to glorify God when they knew him, and to their not liking to retain God in their knowledge. And undoubtedly, no other probable account can be given, of the so universal prevalence of the worship of false gods, and such strange ones as were worshipped in all parts of the world. Certainly, had mankind been of a disposition to delight themselves in the Almighty, they would never have made them such gods as birds and beasts, and the meanest reptiles: nor such as Bacchus and Venus, Belial and Moloch, or even as Jupiter and Juno; gods and goddesses, the patrons and patronesses of lewdness, drunkenness, envy, revenge, and every human or diabolical vice. By the gods that men believe in and worship, it is seen what gods they wish to have. We need not wonder, therefore, that the heathen idolaters are said to have been without excuse; or that their alienation from the life of God, through the ignorance which was in them, is resolved into the blindness of their heart.

But, not only the refined Greeks and Romans, as well as other Gentiles, who were called by them barbarians, worshipped such despicable creatures, and gods of such abominable characters; even the people of Israel, notwithstanding all their revelations, and all the wonders of Divine mercy and wrath of which they had been witnesses, still long retained

an invincible bias to relapse into such sottish and impious idolatry. They were always ready to warp off from the Most High, to the gods of the heathen around them, like a deceitful bow. This their history, from the time they were redeemed out of Egypt, until their captivity in Babylon, abundantly testifies. And this was the grand controversy which God had with them, and his constant complaint against them. See Jer. xliv. 2—6, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Ye have seen all the evils that I have brought upon Jerusalem, and upon all the cities of Judah; because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger, in that they went to burn incense and to serve other gods, whom they knew not; neither they, you, nor your fathers. Howbeit, I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early, and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no more incense unto other gods. Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they were wasted and desolate, as at this day."

3. We have a striking proof of the enmity of mankind against God, in the treatment which his messengers, and all who have borne his image, have generally met with in the world. It is seen how subjects stand affected toward their sovereign, by the manner in which they treat his ministers of state. It is seen whether foreign courts are friendly to a neighboring king, by the reception given to his ambassadors. We may see whether our neighbors are well or ill affected to us, by their treatment of our children and servants. But, judging according to this evidence, what must we think of the loyalty and cordiality of the ancient Jews to the Holy One of Israel? By the account we have of them from

Moses to Malachi, how unkindly did they treat the obedient children and faithful servants of their God! Hear, to this purpose, the address of our Saviour to their capital city, the seat of their religion and government; Luke xiii. 34, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee." Hear also the words of faithful Stephen, when going to his own martyrdom: Acts vii. 51, 52, "Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears; ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them who shewed before of the coming of the just One." See, likewise, the representation given Heb. xi. 36, 37, where, speaking of those eminently good men in former ages, of whom the world was not worthy, the apostle says "They had the trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were slain with the sword."

Nor was the only begotten Son of God himself, when he tabernacled in flesh and dwelt among men, more respected, or treated with less cruelty. He endured such contradictions and reproaches as can hardly be expressed. He was mocked; He was scourged; He was crowned with thorns; He was crucified. Thus lived, and thus died the man that is said to be God's fellow; the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person: One who might well say, "He that hateth me, hateth my Father also." Nor is it to be thought that those who hated the Saviour of the world with such mortal hatred, were worse by nature than other men. They thought as well of themselves as we do of ourselves, and as ill of their persecuting ancestors as we do of them. They built the tombs of the prophets, and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous; and said, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not

have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." The populace who cried out to Pilate, with such clamorous importunity, concerning Jesus, ***Crucify him, crucify him;*** and their rulers, by whose wicked hands he was put to death, no more thought that they should have stoned such godly men as Isaiah and Jeremiah, than the men of this generation now think that they should have joined in the cry against Christ, and in his crucifixion. This was but a specimen of the general temper of mankind toward God, and toward every one that is god-like. And indeed, the same temper was then acted out, for a long time, with unrelenting violence. The apostles, we know, were brought before rulers, imprisoned, and beaten with rods, for no other crime than propagating the gospel: and all of them, it is said, at last suffered martyrdom, in their Master's cause. And within the first three hundred years after Christ, we are told in history of no less than ten general persecutions of the christians, throughout the whole Roman empire, designed to extirpate their very name from off the face of the earth. Thus "did the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. The kings of the earth sat themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

4. That the carnal mind is still enmity against God, appears evident from the strange delight in profaneness, so natural to mankind.

The psalmist, complaining to God of the profligate workers of iniquity, says, "They speak against thee wickedly, and thine *enemies* take thy name in vain." And well may those be called the enemies of God, who do this; or who take pleasure in them that do it. When our neighbors speak lightly of *us* —when they use our name as a proverb and a by-

word—when they make a mock of our serious instructions, counsels and admonitions, how do *we* take it? Certainly, not as a mark of their esteem and friendship, but of their hatred and contempt. But how common a thing is it among mankind, to treat the name, and word, and ways of God, in this contemptuous manner? How natural is it for the sons of men to be profane? to turn the sacred scriptures into ridicule—to curse and swear, and take the name of God in vain? It is so natural to them that nothing is more difficult than to keep little children from learning such language, when they are in the way of it, or than to break them of it when once they have learnt it. And how much pleasure do many appear to take in such discourse! how heartily will they laugh, without the least wit, only at uttering or hearing horrid oaths and imprecations! This often seems no less unaccountable, than shocking, to serious people. What pleasure there can be in this way of sinning, or what temptation there can be to it, many have been exceedingly at a loss to conceive. Perhaps the pride of being thought bold and fearless, may have some influence; though very little, one would think, when it is well known that the most despicable of all human beings, very commonly distinguish themselves by this sort of courage, as much as the great and noble, or any men whatever. Of this mystery, the doctrine in our text, I conceive, gives the only true and full solution.

Whence is it that men are so much disposed to revile and slander one another, and have generally such a relish for defamation? It is owing to general ill-nature, undoubtedly; and very often to a particular, personal enmity. The pleasure taken in profane discourse, it is very certain must proceed from a similar cause. It gratifies the enmity of the carnal mind against God and religion. Were it not for this enmity, such horrid profanation of sacred things, could afford no delight or entertainment to any mor-

tal. Were men friendly to the Deity, it would, certainly, be most offensive and disgusting to them.

5. From the general love of sin, and hatred of the law of righteousness, this enmity plainly appears. "Ye that love the Lord," says the psalmist, "hate evil." Nor can any thing be more natural or necessary than that they should. Those who love God with complancency, will hate sin, for what it is in itself: and those who love him with any friendly affection, will hate sin for his sake; or because of its being an offence and a dishonor to him. The observation of the apostle John is an obvious truth; "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." On the contrary, therefore, men's not keeping the divine commandments, or their being grievous to them, is an evidence of hatred of God.

This is the proof made use of by the apostle of the truth of his assertion in our text. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." A natural man may do the external things which the divine law enjoins, in some instances; but it is by constraint, and not of a willing mind. His heart is never in it, nor subject to it; nor can it be until renewed by divine grace.

6. The enmity of the natural mind of man, against the very being of God, is evident from the aversion discovered to his absolute purposes and decrees, and to the gospel doctrines of grace. It is well known that these doctrines, like the sect of the Nazarines, are every where spoken against. "Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth: Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one

vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" are hard sayings: who can hear them? These texts, and others like them, give disgust to many in most congregations, as soon as they are named as subjects of discourse. Nor will this disgust be removed, unless the true sense of the texts be wholly explained away, or flatly contradicted. To show the reasonableness of them, and to guard against false inferences from them, of a dangerous tendency, does no good. The difficulties are not removed; the objections still remain. And remain they for ever will, as long as the carnal mind remains, unless the Most High will resign his throne. The reins must be given up to every one's own self-determining power, or the mind of man will not be satisfied. God must have no decrees—no sovereignty—no government of the moral world, or the haughtiness of man will be offended.

Some may be really afraid, perhaps, that the preaching of such doctrines, will make men think they are not free agents, or will encourage them in carelessness and sin. These doctrines may be perverted and abused to bad purposes, it is true; and so may every other doctrine of the gospel, and every thing else that is good. But, in general, the danger of this is not the bottom of the business. If it were, why is not as much opposition made to other divine truths, which are not more clearly revealed, or less frequently misimproved? Whatever may be the ostensible reason, the real objection is, men do not like that *God* should govern the world. They are not willing that *his* counsel should stand, or that *his* pleasure should be done. They would have Him have no purpose, which cannot be frustrated; or which is not perpetually liable to be altered, by every caprice of his giddy creatures. They would have *Him* determine nothing, without consulting *them*, and knowing first what is *their* will and pleasure. In short; man would be God, or he would have no God. For a God without decrees—without a plan,

that he is able to prosecute, and will infallibly carry into execution: a God dependant on the self-determining power of every lawless creature, is a perfect cipher in the universe—a mere insignificant name.

We must be willing that there should be a Supreme Ruler over all—an Absolute Sovereign—One who hath bound not only the ocean in his chain; but men, and angels, and devils, by his immutable decrees, over which they cannot pass, or we are not willing to have any GOD. But such a God, certainly is not chosen by the unanimous vote, if by a majority of mankind. Such a God, is by no means consistent with that liberty, which has ever been claimed, and strenuously contended for, in this revolted, rebellious, fallen world.

7. This enmity against God, in the native heart of man, is manifest, from the extreme reluctance which we see in mankind of every age, to all serious discourses and meditations on divine things, and to all the external duties of religion. It is said, "The wicked will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous." It is said of the heathen Gentiles, "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge." And these sayings are true, respecting all natural men.

Why do not the children of men remember their Creator in the days of their youth? They have every thing to remind them of the God that made them; and to excite them to love and serve him. Why do they not, according to the good counsel of their Saviour, "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness?" They are urged to an early attention to religion, by the most interesting and weighty considerations. By the preciousness of the soul, and the irreparableness of its loss. By the shortness and uncertainty of this life, and the never ending duration of that which is to come. By the hope of eternal happiness, and the awful danger of everlasting misery. By mercies and afflictions; by sicknesses often,

and by the frequent deaths of those around them, and near to them. Yet they put it off, and put it off; waiting for a more liesure and convenient season, often till they are ready to drop into the grave with old age. And even when they come to lie upon a dying bed, how common is it for sinners still to delay attending in earnest to the concerns of their souls, as long as they can possibly hope to live?

Whence is it that attendance on the worship of God in his house, only a few hours one day in seven, is so great a weariness; and on every frivolous excuse, is so readily neglected? Whence is it so hard a matter for many persons to maintain secret devotion; or even to attend morning and evening prayers in their families? Did they delight themselves in the Almighty, certainly it would not be such a burden to them always to call upon God. Were they disposed to promote his glory, they would not be so backward to worship him.

8. That the carnal mind is altogether enmity against God, may be learnt from what is seen and felt, when the Holy Ghost is striving with persons in order to their conversion. Not the least love to him is excited in the unregenerate, by the most clear and genuine convictions of their duty and obligation. On the contrary, under a powerful law-work, the heart of a sinner is most of all apt to rise against God, and to feel the strongest exercise of opposition to him. For this we have the testimony of an apostle, respecting himself. "Sin," says he, "taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead."

Thus numerous and incontestible are the evidences, from scripture, observation, and experience, that fallen men are by nature enemies to God in their minds; and at heart, enmity itself against him. It was proposed,

IV. To inquire what can be the cause of this, or how it is to be accounted for.

On this it will be proper to observe one or two things negatively.

1. It is very certain that the enmity of the carnal mind against God, does not arise from ignorance of him, or from an erroneous belief concerning his perfections and ways.

Some have supposed, that there is no enmity in any man against the Supreme Being, but only what is owing to misapprehensions respecting his character, absolutely or relatively understood. In support of this opinion, one argument is taken from what we are told in scripture, of the natural blindness and ignorance of men, in regard to God and the things of God. The Gentiles are represented, in their state of paganism, as "having the understanding darkened, and being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them." And it is said, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them." Whence it is argued, that the enmity of the unconverted cannot be against God's real character, rightly understood; but must be against him only according to their conception of him, which is erroneous and wrong.

In answer to this I would observe, that a distinction is to be made between the knowledge of the true God, and the true knowledge of God: or, between a right speculative idea of what a Being he is, and a perception of his amiableness and glory. The former requires only rational powers, and proper doctrinal information: the latter requires, in addition to these, a holy disposition, or temper of mind. This last kind of knowledge the natural man cannot have: and the only reason is, because he has no taste to

discern the beauty of holiness—no heart to relish moral excellency. But as natural men are rational creatures; and as God has clearly manifested and revealed himself, in his works and in his word; so they may understand what a Being he is, or what his attributes are: which is knowledge enough to lay a foundation for the exercise of enmity against him as being what he really is, and not merely as thinking him to be what he is not.

But, it has been further said, All men naturally approve a good moral character, and condemn a bad one, whenever they are fairly understood, stripped of all false colorings and disguises: and hence it has been concluded that God, who is perfectly and infinitely good, cannot be hated by any, cannot but be loved by all, unless through some misapprehension concerning him.

To this, however, it need only to be replied, that there is a distinction to be made, between approving or condemning a character in our conscience, and loving or hating it in our heart. All men, and undoubtedly all rational creatures, in their consciences, approve that which is good, and condemn that which is evil, in characters and actions, as far as they understand them. But this is a very different thing from loving holiness, and hating sin. Notwithstanding this universal moral sense, of good and evil, opposite characters cannot accord and feel a mutual complacency, or friendship, any more than there can be communion between light and darkness, or Christ and Belial. Though all men approve and disapprove alike, yet, as an unjust man is an abomination to the just; so he that is upright in his ways, is abomination to the wicked. Nothing is more common than for men to see and approve what is good, while yet they love, and pursue with eagerness, that which is evil. Sinners cannot but feel a sort of veneration for those whom they are convinced are truly virtuous and religious; yet they will shun their company,

and often persecute or revile them. And while they associate with the vicious and profane, as their most agreeable companions, they cannot but condemn them in their consciences. In like manner, the Divine character, rightly understood, must meet the approbation of every man's conscience; while, nevertheless, no wicked man's heart can be pleased with it, or feel any friendliness to a Being so glorious in holiness.

But that the enmity of the carnal mind is against the real character of God, and not merely against a mistaken idea of him, is evident from almost every argument by which this enmity has been now proved. It is evident from the sinner's saying in his heart, or wishing to believe, there is no such God. It is evident from the idolatry of the heathen, and the strange gods which they made or worshipped—gods which, instead of being Almighty, had no might; instead of being omniscient, had no knowledge; or instead of being holy, just and good, were envious, unrighteous, and abominably wicked. It is evident from the delight which sinners take in the profanation of things believed to be good, and most sacred. It is evident from their hatred of the known laws of righteousness, and not being able to bear subjection to them. It is evident from their opposing the doctrines of grace, of divine sovereignty, and divine decrees. It is evident from their reluctance to hear or think of things eternal; and from their putting off all serious attention to religious subjects, contrary to the dictates and painful remonstrances of conscience. It is evident from the unfriendly and cruel treatment which the faithful servants and prophets of God, and his only begotten Son, have met with in the world.

Indeed, were not the enmity of the carnal mind against the real Supreme Being, there would be no propriety in calling it enmity against *God*. Most certainly, it could not be justly represented as implying any moral depravity. Opposition to wrong

notions, of the Most High, is right. This is so far from being peculiar to the carnal mind, that the more spiritually minded any are, the more will they be opposed to erroneous representations of the Deity, and with the warmer zeal will they contend against them.

Nothing can be more evident, than that the enmity of wicked men, against a holy and righteous God, does not arise from a mere misunderstanding.

2. It cannot well be supposed to be altogether owing, to fears of divine wrath and punishment. When sinners are under awakenings, and destruction from God is a terror to them, their enmity against him may be increased; to be sure it will be more sensibly felt: but it was in the bottom of their heart before, however unperceived. Those most secure in sin, practically say unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." By speaking against him, by taking his name in vain, and by wicked works, it is plainly seen that they are enemies to him in their minds. And it is hence evident that their enmity against the Almighty doth not wholly originate from an apprehension that he is angry with them, and will cast them into hell.

On the other hand, I do not think that it proceeds from disinterested malevolence; or from a disposition to hate a good being when considered as standing in no relation to one's self; or so as not to hurt one's pride, or any of the feelings of personal respect. There is no necessity of supposing a principle of disinterested malice in any creature: nor can such a principle be supposed to exist, without its having been produced immediately by the same power that created the world. But such an hypothesis appears anti-scriptural, and absurd. I conclude, therefore, that there is not, in the most depraved creature, disinterested unfriendliness to any being; or hatred of holiness for its own sake.

The way is now prepared to say, affirmatively, whence the enmity of the carnal mind against God does arise; and how it is to be accounted for.

I suppose it proceeds, from mere *selfishness*. That is, from self-love, without the counterpoise of any disinterested benevolence to other beings. There are several ways in which such perfect selfishness will naturally be productive of enmity against others; and the more so in proportion as they are above us, and have power over us: most of all, therefore, against the Supreme Being. Self-love, without benevolence to others, is directly opposed to all subordination—to all subjection—to all control. It aspires after absolute independence, and unbounded liberty. It also loveth to have the pre-eminence, in all things. It hates to be out shone; or to have any superior, in greatness, or fame, or felicity. Selfishness, when total and entire, makes the individual in whom it reigns, however low and little, the centre and end of every thought and wish, of every word and action. Now, it is easy to see, that one whose heart is thus totally selfish, will thence become an enemy to all around him; especially to all above him; and more especially to the Most High, who is infinite in greatness and glory, and absolute in dominion over all.

A few inferences will now close this long discourse.

1. Hence we may learn, that the common love of liberty, though natural to men, is no infallible argument in favor of human nature.

The love of one kind of liberty, indeed, and of several kinds in a due degree, is a good thing. A desire of liberty from the bondage of corruption, is certainly laudable. This is the liberty meant, when it is said, John viii. 36, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." A desire of liberty

from menial servitude, if it be not an impatient desire, is what the gospel allows and approves. "Art thou called, being a servant?" says the apostle to the Corinthians, "care not for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather." A desire of liberty to do our duty, in every station of life; and liberty to speak the truth, when it ought to be spoken, is undoubtedly reasonable and right.

But that ardent love of political liberty, which is common among men, and which has made so much noise in the world, may possibly not be a virtue, acceptable to God. If it were, mankind must certainly be a very virtuous race of beings, without the grace of God that bringeth salvation: for, in natural men—in Pagans, and infidels, this flaming love of liberty is ever most conspicuous. But, possibly, in many instances, it may be nothing else, at bottom, than narrow self-love,

> "Or close ambition, varnish'd o'er with zeal."

It may proceed from the very same principle, and want of principle, whence the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, nor can be. That such notions of liberty as have often prevailed, and those violent commotions which the ardent love of such liberty has often occasioned, should be so generally approved and celebrated, is rather a proof of the deceitfulness of sin, and of the readiness of mankind to call evil good; than any indisputable evidence of the goodness of human nature.

2. Hence we need not wonder, that, in such a world as this, there should be much opposition made to good government, as well as to pure and undefiled religion: that artful attempts should be made totally to separate them, and prevent their being any support to each other; and by all manner of sophistry and slander, as much as possible, to weaken the restraining influence of both.

It has been said, The worst of men will wish to have good government; because they must know it is necessary for their own safety and peace.

But there is a mistake in this argument. The hearts of men govern their heads. Their passions, and corrupt inclinations, blind their eyes, in a thousand instances, to their own plainest interest. Though wicked men may be convinced of its being necessary for their own safety, that others should be restrained from iniquity; and though, from this conviction, they may sometimes vote for wise and just rulers; yet, from their hatred of being under subjection and restraint themselves, they may easily be led to struggle for licentious liberty, to clamor against good rulers, and to advance men who profess to be their humble servants; or who, being of loose manners themselves, they hope will not much interrupt them in their ungodly and unrighteous freedoms. They may easily be induced to form factions and cabals, and to combine together against the best government, as well as the best religion. They may wish to have them totally disconnected, wherein God hath joined them together for mutual support; and thus, as well as by other means, to have both weakened, that their galling bands may be broken with less difficulty, and their restraining cords cast away from them.

Until, more generally, mankind are willing there should be a God in heaven, who is good and just; certainly, we are not to expect that they will be unanimous in choosing just and good rulers on earth; or that they will be long easy and peaceable under the administration of such.

3. Hence good men, in every station and calling, should learn to bear with patience, the enmity and revilings of mankind. "Marvel not, my brethren," says the apostle John, "if the world hate you." When it is considered how men treated the Son of

God, and how they treat the name of God; no good man should think much of it, if they treat his name and person, with no great respect or tenderness. "If the world hate you," said our Saviour to his disciples, "ye know that it hated me before it hated you." And again; "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord."

Christ hath also pronounced a beatitude on his followers, who should expose themselves to the enmity of the world, by their steadfast opposition to its evil ways, and by their faithful adherence to him. "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake."

4. From what has been said it may be seen, and should be laid to heart, how sinful and dangerous it is, to continue in a state of native depravity, and opposition to God and goodness. Can any thing be more criminal than to be at enmity with your Creator? or any thing more awful than to have the Almighty for your adversary? What can you do when He riseth up? and when He shall visit in anger, what can you answer? Lay down then the weapons of rebellion, your wicked works; and seek pardon and reconciliation. He hath said, "Fury is not in me: who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me."

5. The apostle's inference from our text, is obviously true and just. "So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God." The externally moral, the reformed, and such as are in the diligent use of

the means of grace, are apt to trust in these good things, as what will recommend them to the divine favor. But if the mind be still enmity against God, can he be pleased with such appearances of respect and duty? All such righteousnesses are as filthy rags —are dead works. Such self-righteousness is often fatal to souls, as well as open unrighteousness. Isa. l. 11, "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow."

SERMON XIV.

ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD, IN THE EFFECTUAL CALLING OF SINNERS.

ROMANS IX. 18.

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

THIS is a doctrine of the gospel, against which many have ever been ready to object. It is a doctrine which needs explanation. Rightly understood, as taught in the New-Testament, it will commend itself to every man's conscience, I apprehend, as unexceptionable; however displeasing it may always be, to the unhumbled and unsanctified heart of man

God's leaving his ancient people the Jews, generally, to reject the gospel; and sending it to the Gentiles, accompanied with the efficacious operation of his Holy Spirit, was what led the apostle to insist upon this doctrine in our text and context. To silence the murmurings of the former, he observes to them that the Holy One of Israel had always claimed, and often exercised a like sovereignty, in making the first last, and the last first. To this purpose, after cursorily noticing the preference given to Isaac before Ishmael, in the family of Abraham; he men-

tions more at large, the instance of Esau and Jacob, and what was revealed to their mother Rebecca concerning them, before their birth: Ver. 11—13, "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, (that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth,) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger: as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." To this purpose he recites a saying of God to their venerated lawgiver; ver. 15, "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." To this end also, he refers them to what was recorded of the great oppressor of their ancestors in Egypt; ver. 17, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." From these examples and declarations, the apostle then draws the conclusion in our text: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

For the illustration and defence of this conclusion, it is now proposed,

I. To inquire what is meant by God's hardening men, and what by his having mercy on them.

II. To explain his sovereignty in thus making men to differ: and,

III. To answer objections against the doctrine of such divine sovereignty.

What is here meant by God's hardening men, and what by his having mercy on them, we will first briefly inquire.

Sinners are said to be hardened, when they remain in impenitence and unbelief; and especially, when they grow more and more secure in sin. When they go on in the broad way to destruction, unapprehensive of guilt or danger. When neither counsels nor reproofs, mercies nor judgments, are regarded by them, or make any suitable impression on their minds. When, in addition to the stony heart, common to all natural men, which renders them incapable of all truly virtuous or religious affections; they have lost, in a great measure, the feelings of conscience, of shame, and of fear. The case of such is often described in scripture. See Job xv. 25, 26, "For he stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty. He runneth upon him, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of his bucklers." Jer. vi. 15, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush." Eph. iv. 19, "Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." And 1 Tim. iv. 2, "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

But, how are we to understand that *God* thus hardens men?

It must be understood, at least, that he leaves them to continue in impenitence, and to grow secure in evil courses. It must be understood, also, that God orders all those outward circumstances and events, which prove the means of making sinners more and more hardened in iniquity. But any thing more, I apprehend, it need not be supposed he ever does, in this matter. Certainly, there is nothing in his word, or in his Providences, which would thus harden any, were it not for their perverse misimprovement of things good in themselves, and well adapted to do them good, had they an ear to hear, and a heart to understand. Nor need we imagine

that God ever infuses hardness of heart, or insensibility of conscience, into any man, by the immediate influence of his Holy Spirit. We are told, indeed, of his making the heart of a people fat, and their ears dull of hearing: but by this nothing more may be meant, than what is expressed in other places, by his leaving people to their own heart-lust; and giving men over to a reprobate mind. The proper idea of hardness of heart, and also of a seared conscience, is only the want of feeling, or of an aptness to feel. To the taking place of either of these, therefore, a mere withdrawment, on God's part, is sufficient. The giving a new sense, must be a work of creation; but in order to the weakening, or the total loss, of any of our senses, no such positive divine operation is required. Accordingly, men are most commonly said, in scripture, to harden themselves. As every man is tempted to sin, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed; so, when any one is hardened in sin, it is by his own blinding passions and evil practices.

The history of Pharaoh, alluded to in our text, may help us to understand how far the divine agency is concerned in hardening sinners. God says, indeed, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." But how was this done? In the first place by permitting the miracles of Moses and Aaron to be counterfeited by magic art. "The magicians did so with their enchantments, and Pharaoh's heart was hardened." His obduracy was further increased, by the repeated removal of the plagues sent upon him. Thus, as soon as the frogs died, it is said, "When Pharaoh saw there was respit, he hardened his heart." And when the swarms of flies were taken away at one time, and the thunder and hail ceased at another, "Pharaoh hardened his heart," we are told, "and sinned yet the more." This is a common case with sinners. "Because sentence against an evil work

is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

The scriptures do not teach us, I think, nor does reason oblige us to believe, that God ever hardens the impenitent workers of iniquity, except in some such ways as these. By withholding the influences of his Spirit, to awaken their fears, quicken their consciences, and soften their hearts: by permitting Satan or his instruments to deceive and stupify them; and by exercising such goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, as ought in all reason to lead them to repentance; but from which, (through an evil heart of unbelief and ingratitude) they are led to greater boldness and security in sin.

By God's having mercy on men, as it here stands opposed to his hardening them, we are naturally to understand his awakening, convincing, and concerting sinners. More especially, as it is expressed in Ezekiel, his "taking the stony heart out of their flesh, and giving them a heart of flesh." Says the apostle to Titus, "according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." And that this is the mercy spoken of in our text, appears plainly from its connection. See particularly, ver. 21—24, of the context. "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory; even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." The apostle is evidently speaking, not merely of an election and reprobation of nations, in regard to external privileges; but also of God's calling some individuals to the belief and obedience of the gospel, and to the blessings of his kingdom of

glory; while he left others to impenitence and final perdition.

II. Let us now consider how it is to be understood, that God, acts the absolute sovereign, in making men thus to differ.

By divine sovereignty we are never to understand, such groundless arbitrariness, as is often acted by the potentates of the earth. *God* never acts without reason. He never does things, as men often do, merely because he can, or because he will. To created intelligences, "his way is in the sea," many times, "and his path in the deep waters;" but to himself, "his footsteps," are always well known. If "he giveth not account of any of his matters," it is not because he is unable to give a good account of them all. "Being predestinated," says the apostle, "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the *counsel* of his own will." Which implies, not only that God asks no advice, and needs none; but also that he always acts with counsel —with consummate wisdom. Our Saviour, in his prayer on a certain occasion said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it *seemed good* in thy sight." In this case, and in all other cases, it *seemeth good* in the sight of God to do as he does: and, undoubtedly, there is always some *good reason*, why it so seemeth.

But the following things are supposed or implied, in God's sovereignty, relating to the conversion of sinners:

1. That, in point of justice, he is under no obligation, one way or the other. And this is an unquestionable truth. He can be just, and yet have mercy; and he can be just, and not have mercy, on any unregenerate sinner.

Indeed, had it not been for the mediation and atonement of Christ, saving mercy could not have been exercised towards any of the fallen race of man, consistently with justice. Sin must not go unpunished: the guilty must by no means be cleared, without adequate satisfaction. God's righteousness, as governor of the world, would have obliged him to execute deserved indignation and wrath on every soul of man that doth evil, had there been no other possible way than by personal punishment, to manifest his holy displeasure, to support his rightful authority, and to make his rational creatures stand in awe, and not sin. But now, since he hath found a ransom—since he hath set forth his own Son to be a propitiation; he can be just and the justifier of every believer in Jesus; and just in giving repentance and faith to whomsoever he sees fit. Still, however, he is at full liberty to choose the subjects of his renewing mercy, as he thinks proper. Even the obedience and sufferings of Christ, do not lay God the Father under any obligation, which is inconsistent with his most sovereign grace. And certainly no sinner, by his own personal merit, can lay the Most High under such obligation. In this regard, "there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." No one, therefore, has any just claim upon him, on the ground of merit. Every one hath merited to be for ever cast off, and made an eternal vessel of wrath.

But the honor of God's law and justice, since Christ has died, doth not require that mankind should be dealt with according to the respective merit of each individual. Nor is this now the invariable rule of his procedure with the fallen children of men. He doth not have mercy only on those who deserve mercy, and harden all who deserve to be hardened. If he did, he would harden all: he would have mercy on none. In making the chosen people of Christ, his willing people, in the day of his power,

he deals with them far better than they justly deserve, though not inconsistently with justice. There is no merit which obliges him to save, nor any demerit which obliges him not to save, any impenitent sinner. In point of justice, he is at perfect liberty to regenerate, or to leave in unregeneracy, any child of Adam. His having mercy on whom he will have mercy, most evidently supposes this.

2. It supposes that he is at liberty also, in point of truth: being bound by no conditional promises, or conditional threatenings.

In some cases the truth of God obliges him. In all cases wherein he has given his word. This is the case respecting the pardon of penitent believers, and their final salvation; and respecting the eternal perdition of those who die in impenitence and unbelief. It is written, "He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." It is written, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Hence, though justification is of God's free grace, as well as effectual calling; yet it is never said, Whom he will he justifieth, and whom he will he condemneth. The reason is, in this he proceeds with men according to an established constitution. A constitution of which not one tittle shall ever fail, any more than of the moral law. The promises and threatenings of the gospel, will be as inviolably observed by the Judge of all the earth, as the original rule of eternal right. But, with respect to effectual calling, there are no such divine declarations. God hath left himself at liberty in his word, to regenerate, or to leave in unregeneracy, any impenitent sinner whom he pleases. As long as persons are unrenewed in the spirit of their minds, and have not the love of God in them, whatever external duties they may perform, from

selfish motives, they are entitled to no promises of converting grace. Nor does any sin, (unless we must except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost,) exclude a person from the possibility of obtaining this mercy. God may grant repentance unto life, to the greatest sinner; or he may not grant it to one who has committed the fewest and least aggravated sins, notwithstanding any thing in his word. This, I think, is implied in the doctrine of his having mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardening whom he will.

3. It may imply, that he is free from all those feelings towards sinners, which might bias his mind, or render him incapable of dealing with them according to the most perfect counsel of his own wisdom. That he is never so influenced by love or hatred, tenderness or anger, as to be unable to save, or to destroy, any sinner, when he judges it will be for the best.

Divine mercy is infinite; but it is always guided by divine wisdom. It can pass over the highest provocations; but it will never lead to such lenity, in particular instances, as would do hurt upon the whole. "God is angry with the wicked every day;" and in proportion, no doubt, to the greatness of their wickedness; but he is never so angry as to be implacable and unmerciful. His anger will never burn to the lowest hell, only when it is absolutely necessary, for important ends. The goodness of God is an infinite inclination to promote the highest possible good of the universe; and, as far as is consistent with this, the best good of every individual, however despicable, however ill-deserving. And as to that wrath which is cruel, such fury is not in him. God is not subject to any thing like those ungovernable emotions of weak mortals, which often obstruct the proper exercises of pity; and which often render the operations of it indiscreet. Neither his complacency nor displeasure—neither his anger nor com-

passion, should be conceived of as resembling our irregular passions. He is therefore calmly free, to exercise unerring wisdom, in softening or hardening, the rebellious children of men. Hence,

4. Such is the sovereignty of God, that it cannot be foreknown, by any rules of human probability, who will be the subjects of his renewing grace. This I take to be one thing implied in our Saviour's saying to Nicodemus; "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

The parentage or education of persons, is nothing whereby it can be certainly determined, whether they will be truly virtuous or not. Sometimes those descended from the most pious ancestors, are profligate, hardened wretches; and sometimes those born of most ungodly parents, are the regenerate children of God. Abraham had a wild and mocking Ishmael; Isaac, a profane Esau; and Eli, and David, had very wicked sons. On the other hand, Abijah, in whom there was found some good thing toward the Lord, descended immediately from Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. The good king Hezekiah, was son to an idolatrous Ahaz; and Josiah, whose heart was tender, and whose piety and virtue were so eminent, was the son of Ammon, who did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done.

The outward condition of persons, whether high or low, affluent or indigent, is not any thing whence it can be known, what their state will be relative to another world. Our Saviour indeed says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven;" but he adds, "With God all things are possible." In the days of the apostles, we are told, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many

mighty, not many noble were called :" *some* nevertheless, of the great, and powerful, and learned, then were, and have been in every succeeding age, good christians. And certainly, all the poor of this world, are not rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

No external morality or immorality of persons, makes it certain whether they will be saved, or left to perish in sin and self-righteousness. The young ruler who came running to our Saviour, addressed him so respectfully, and inquired of him with so much earnestness what he should do that he might have eternal life, it seems, had been very exact in keeping the commandments from his youth up; yet he lacked one thing, and after all had not a heart to relinquish his earthly possessions, and take up his cross, and become a follower of Christ. But Mary Magdalene, and one of the thieves crucified with our Saviour, were made true penitents, and had their sins forgiven them.

Lastly; Neither the greatest present security in sin renders the case of a person hopeless, in regard to obtaining mercy; nor do the greatest awakenings or convictions of natural men, remove all grounds of fear, that they may still fail of the special grace of God. Those who have been most stout-hearted, as well as farthest from righteousness, are sometimes suddenly smitten to the ground, and brought to be of a humble and contrite spirit. And on the other hand, there is no stage of convictions, perhaps, from which some have not relapsed into insensibility of conscience, and final hardness of heart. After regeneration, we may be confident that he who hath begun a good work will perform it, until it is perfected; but previously to this, all is uncertainty. An unbeliever, having not complied with the covenant of grace, is unentitled to any of its promises. All these promises of God, are Yea and Amen, only in Christ; and they belong to none but those who be-

long to him. When a sinner's convictions are most deep and genuine, still he may be left, and be lost: as in the case of the most obstinate opposers of all religion, there is a peradventure that they may be brought to repentance. God is sometimes found of them that sought him not; and many shall seek to enter in at the strait gate, and shall not be able,

We proceed now, as was proposed,

III. To consider the objections which have been made, and which are apt to arise in the minds of persons, against this doctrine.

One of the most common objections, and the first which I shall mention, is, that such divine sovereignty is unjust.

This objection is introduced in our context, after the instance of Esau and Jacob: "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?"

The apostle answers, "God forbid;" or, far be it. Be it far from any man, thus to reply against his Maker; or to harbor in his heart such a bold and injurious suggestion.

And after what has been said, for explaining how God acts as a sovereign, in having mercy on sinners, and in hardening them, it may easily be seen, that his justice herein is unimpeachable: and that any objection against it, thence arising, is unfounded, and without the least color of reason.

This divine sovereignty respects, only the bestowment or withholding of undeserved favors. There is no claim, on the part of man, in point of equity. In matters of free gift, even *men* are not wont to be accused of injustice, though they single out some, in preference to others, as the objects of their beneficence: And shall man be thought to have a juster right than God, to act the sovereign in such cases? The answer of the householder to one of his mur-

muring laborers, in our Saviour's parable of the vineyard, is enough, in all reason, for ever to silence this objection. "Friend, I do *thee* no wrong:—Take that *thine* is, and go thy way:—Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? is thine eye evil because I am good?" We may as reasonably dispute the right of the Supreme Being to make any differences among men, in the gifts of nature or Providence, as his right to afford the influences of his special grace, with sovereign diversity. Yea, we may as well dispute the justice of his making any creatures inferior to men; or men not equal to the highest angels. In matters of unmerited favor, sovereign discriminations may surely be made, without any interference with the claims of justice. Let sinners only be convinced that they deserve nothing from God but everlasting destruction, and their mouths will be stopped. They will see that they lie at sovereign mercy. And what else can those deserve at the hand of God, who have been guilty of numberless transgressions of his holy law, and who are still of that carnal mind which is enmity against him? But,

2. It is objected, that if the doctrine of divine sovereignty, in making these infinite differences, does not suppose that there is unrighteousness with God; yet it supposes, at least, that he is partial, and a respecter of persons. We read, "There is no respect of persons with God:" but if it be true, that he leaves some sinners to final impenitence, and changes the hearts of others, who were equally unworthy, or more ill-deserving, must he not be the greatest respecter of persons in the universe?

To this I answer; That respect of persons which the Bible condemns, and any thing of which is denied to be in God, has reference only to matters of judgment and retribution. It means that favor or disaffection which may bias a judge, and cause him

to pass an unrighteous sentence. So that, according to the scripture sense of respecting persons, this objection comes to the same as the former, and hath been already answered.

But in any sense of the phrase, there is no respect of persons in God's having mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardening whom he will. It is not any thing which God respects in one, more than in another, that is the cause of his giving him a better disposition. The reverse of this, is the very doctrine itself. The subjects of God's special grace, are those who were *most* hateful in his holy eyes, as well as those who were least so. It cannot therefore be from a partial love of complacency, certainly, that he is induced to make these differences. Nor need it be supposed to proceed from a partial love of benevolence. A rich man may help one needy person more than another, and yet feel alike benevolent to both: he may think that giving to one of them will some way answer better purposes, than giving to the other. A parent, in the disposal of his estate, may settle a larger inheritance on one child than on some of the rest, and yet have an equal affection for them all. He may have a view to the honorable support of his own name, or to the good of his family taken collectively, or to the public good. And may not the supreme Parent and Benefactor, have equally wise inducements for the various differences he makes among his creatures, in creation, providence and grace?

His having mercy on some, and hardening some, of every description among natural men, is so far from indicating any respect of persons, that it clearly evinces the very reverse. It plainly proves that the election of the subjects of his special grace, is "not for their sakes, but for his own name's sake:" or that, not a partial kindness for individuals, but a view to the greater general good, is the ground of all this variety of distribution. But,

3. Perhaps it will be said, we can conceive no adequate reasons why there should be such differences; or why it would not be better—more for the glory of God and the universal good, if all men were saved, and made equally happy. To this, however, the answer is at hand. What if we, who "are of yesterday, and know nothing," cannot comprehend the reasons of the ways of the only wise God? does it thence follow that they must be arbitrary and without reason? Let us not be so vain as to imagine that we can find out the Almighty unto perfection. Shall a worm of the dust, assume the seat of universal judgment, and condemn the eternal counsels of heaven as unwise, because the wisdom of them is beyond his shallow comprehension! Had God revealed no reasons why he does not save all men, or why he makes one man to differ from another, and could we conceive of none; yet a very small degree of modesty would lead us to conclude, that He may see sufficient reasons.

The reasons why he hath mercy on this person rather than on that, in particular instances, it may well be supposed, are secret things which belong to Him, and of which it does not concern us to be informed: but some of the general reasons of his singling out the objects of his mercy in such a sovereign manner, are revealed; and are such as we may in some good measure understand.

One reason is, that he may hide pride from man, and that the freeness of his grace may be duly manifested. Isa. ii. 17, "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted." And Rom. ix. 11, "That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth."

Another reason is, that his glory may be more conspicuous, in the punishment of all sorts of sinners, according to their respective deeds and desert.

See in the context, ver. 22, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." In the future misery of the finally impenitent, the holiness and justice, as well as the power and wrath of God, will be conspicuous. And by his leaving some to perish whose sins have been attended with all the different circumstances and degrees of aggravation, and alleviation, opportunity will be given for a more full display of exact remunerating righteousness.

Hereby also, it will be made more fully manifest, that the atonement and righteousness of Christ, are the alone meritorious ground of any man's being saved from wrath, and inheriting the kingdom of heaven. When it shall be seen that all who have an interest in Christ by faith, are justified; and all who have not, are condemned; and that both the one and the other, consist of young and old, wise and unwise, those who have sinned without law, and under the law; of the circumcision and uncircumcision, Barbarians, Cythians, bond and free; it will then most fully appear, that "Christ is all in all." That his merit is all-sufficient; and the only foundation of a title to eternal life, or of deliverance from eternal death.

Again; by a part of mankind's being saved, and a part left to perish, and by its being seen what they both once were; namely, of all characters, from the greatest to the least of sinners, the most moral and the most profligate, the most thoughtful and the most careless and hardened; the work and grace of the Holy Ghost, will be most illustriously evident. If only the better sort were saved, or if all were made holy and happy, it might be thought that they became good of their own mere motion; or were made so by mere moral suasion, and the renewing work of the Divine Spirit would not be so manifest to all. But when, as the apostle says, "Such were some of you;" infidels, fornicators, drunkards, thieves,

murderers; "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified;" all must acknowledge, "This is the finger of God." Accordingly, the design of God in quickening those who had notoriously walked according to the prince of the power of the air, is said to be, that, in the ages to come, he might *shew* the exceeding riches of his grace, as well as the working of his mighty power.

These reasons are revealed; and many others there may be, why only a part of mankind are saved, and why it seemeth good in the sight of God, to choose the subjects of his mercy with such sovereign variety. Still,

4. It is objected, that this doctrine of divine sovereignty, will have a tendency to discourage from duty, and from being in the use of the means of grace; and to embolden the unconverted in the ways of sin. That if, as the apostle says in the context, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy:" and if it be true, that "he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy," not respecting any antecedent qualifications or doings of sinners, then it is all one what the unregenerate do, or whether any means are used with them, as to the probability of their obtaining mercy, or the danger of their being hardened unto perdition.

But, I answer; It is not necessarily implied in this doctrine, nor do I believe it is true, that the externally moral, and those who are in the diligent use of the outward and ordinary means of grace, are no more likely to be saved, than the immoral, the careless and inattentive. It has been said, that God is under no obligation in justice, or by his word, to have mercy on awakened, reformed, convicted sinners; or not to have mercy on those of the most opposite characters. That he is not so angry with any impenitent sinner, but that he can have mercy on him; nor so well pleased with any, but that he

may leave them to final hardness and destruction: And that there is nothing in the antecedent characters of persons, whereby it can be *known*, by us, that they will be converted and saved, or that they will not. But none of these things imply, that there is as great a human *probability* of the salvation of one unregenerate sinner as of another.

All these things are true with respect to the acquisition of earthly good things. In regard even to these, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." No man is certain that he shall have a crop, however carefully he cultivates and sows his ground. "One piece is rained upon, and the piece whereupon it raineth not withereth." Nothing is merited, nothing is promised, nothing is certain, as to success in our worldly pursuits. Nevertheless, those who apply themselves with prudent diligence, commonly succeed best. Though the plowing of the wicked is sin, yet, in general, "he that tilleth his land is satisfied with bread;" and "the sluggard, who will not plow, begs in harvest, and has nothing." And in regard to diligence or slothfulness in seeking eternal salvation, the probable consequences may be much the same, consistently with the doctrine of divine sovereignty, as now explained. Between any seeking of the unregenerate, and obtaining mercy, the connection may not be so constant, indeed, as between sowing and reaping; but in both cases there is a hopeful, though not an infallible connection. When the outward and ordinary means of instruction and conversion are used with persons, or by them, as well as in the case of laboring for the comforts of the bodily life, there is more reason to hope for a blessing, than when those means are neglected.

Ministers of the gospel are directed, " in meekness to instruct them that oppose themselves; if God, peradventure, will give them repentance:" which implies, that though it is not certain what will be the event, yet it is more likely that unbelievers will be saved by converting grace, if they are properly instructed, than if they are not. It is said, " Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it:" which, though it be not a promise, is yet a maxim, importing, at least, that there is more reason to hope a child will make a good man if he has a good education, than if left to himself. Whence it follows, that in the way of external regularity, there is more reason to expect sanctifying grace, than in ways of licentiousness and vice.

Some passages of scripture, however, may be thought to have a contrary appearance. Particularly, that saying which is several times repeated by our Saviour; " The first shall be last, and the last first." But this implies no more than that such is *sometimes* the case; not that it is always or generally so. Christ's words to the chief priests and elders of the Jews, Matt. xxi. 31, " Verily I say unto you, that publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you;" may likewise be thought to teach us, that the externally moral are less likely to be the subjects of special grace, than the openly vicious and immoral. But neither is this to be so understood, as a general maxim. The case was very particular. These chief priests and elders were established in a system of principles, most opposite to the fundamental doctrines of christianity. A system which led them to look upon themselves so righteous, as to have no need of repentance—so whole, as to have no need of the great Physician of souls. There was less human probability, that men thus self-righteous—thus bigotted to the pharisaical system, would embrace the gospel, than even lewd persons, and unrighteous oppressors; who were less

under the influence of religious prejudices, and who had no cloak for their sins. But very different from that of those pharisees, is the case of moral persons, well indoctrinated in the christian religion, who know themselves to be in a state of nature, and who are anxiously attentive to the means of grace. No conclusion can be drawn from the one to the other, that these last are less likely to repent and believe the gospel, than careless, uninstructed, and openly profane sinners. The situation of either, indeed, is truly hazardous; and no one can tell which of them will be saved, or which will be lost. But I cannot think we are warranted by these, or any other texts, to conclude, that prostitutes, and those who give themselves up to the most iniquitous practices; or those who cast off fear, and live in the neglect of all the appointed means of conversion, are in the most hopeful way, of any among the unregenerate, to obtain the righteousness of the kingdom of God.

And if we attend to the question in the light which experience reflects upon it, I believe it will appear that the probability of salvation, other things being equal, is much in favor of the moral and attentive. More commonly, the most abandoned are not the persons effectually called. "Such were *some* of you," says the apostle; but he does not say that the election of grace was chiefly of such. Sometimes a Manasseh, or a Mary Magdalene is called; but they are mentioned in scripture as rare instances —as singular examples of sovereign mercy, that none might despair. And similar, I apprehend, is still seen to be the case, as far as we are able to judge.

When there is a revival of religion in any place, (except where enthusiasm prevails, and ignorance is the mother of devotion,) the greater number thought to be converted, generally, I believe; is of such as had been religiously educated, and had less hardened themselves by vicious courses. Instances of open infidels, and notorious profligates, brought to repentance, indeed, are more taken notice of in narratives

and conversation: but it is because they are more uncommon, and more marvellous.

Thus notwithstanding the evident sovereignty of God, in the effectual calling of sinners; both scripture and experience afford sufficient inducements to be in the use of the means of grace, and powerful dissuasives from the ways of sin, to all who have any serious concern about the salvation of their souls. In regard to the wicked man's forsaking his external wickedness, as well as in regard to his returning unto the Lord in sincerity, the great—the only discouragement, is the want of a willing mind. Men will labor hard for the meat that perisheth, notwithstanding the sovereignty of God is so often seen blessing or in blasting the fruits of their labors: but, for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, if there be any uncertainty of success, they will do nothing! They immediately say, "There is no hope"—there is no encouragement!

By way of inference and application;

1. Hence hardened sinners have no reason to think they are not to blame, because it is God that hardens them. Hardness of heart is blameable, let it come how it will: but sinners, according to what has now been said, are often, if not always, exceedingly culpable in hardening themselves.

2. Hence, on the other hand, no impenitent sinner has any reason to make himself easy; either from an imagination that it must be in his own power to become good at any time, or from an apprehension that he is now in a hopeful way, and not far from the kingdom of heaven.

Some, no doubt, on the belief of a self-determining power to will and do right, whether they please or not; or because they think themselves not so depraved, but that they have a moral power to reform and repent, stupidly cast off fear, neglect prayer, and go on in known sin: trusting in themselves, that they can

pray whenever there shall be evident occasion for it; and in God, that he will then certainly pardon and save them. I have heard of one of this character, who said, he was not concerned, if he could only have warning enough of his death, to say, "Lord have mercy on me." But who was cut off at last by a violent stroke, with very different words in his mouth; namely, "The devil take all." It is true, "Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth;" if he ask and seek aright, in ever so few words, or ever so late. But to have a heart so to ask and seek, is "of God that sheweth mercy."

Others are unconcerned, because of their morality, and regular attendance on religious duties: and some grow easy, perhaps, because of their supposed awakenings and convictions. It is true; there is more hope of the salvation of the externally moral and religious than of such as are of a contrary character: Yet, if they make a righteousness of these mere externals, or think they please God, their fancied religion, may be their ruin. It is true, when persons are under *real* awakenings, there is more hope of them still: Yet, if their concern makes them unconcerned, the last state with them may be worse than the first. In every case, there is still awful danger, while persons are out of Christ, the only ark of safety.

3. Hence let no sinner, however dead he finds himself in sin, despair of mercy. When Ezekiel was asked, "Can these dry bones live?" he answered, "O Lord, thou knowest."

4. Hence let those who have reason to hope that they have been effectually called, ever ascribe it to the sovereign grace of God; and make it their great concern to live to his glory.

Remember the words of the apostle James; "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

SERMON XV.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF PERSONAL ELECTION.

ROMANS XI. 5.

Even so then, at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

IN the two chapters next preceding this, the apostle had spoken of God's calling the Gentiles, and rejection of the Jews; and had expressed, in strong terms, the extreme anxiety he felt for the latter, who were his kinsmen according to the flesh. But in this chapter he consoles himself with the assurance, that the reprobation of Israel was far from being universal. That a happy number of this once chosen nation, were still the objects of God's electing love, and the subjects of his special grace: ver. 1—4, "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who

have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." The apostle adds, *Even so then, at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*

My intended subject of discourse, is the doctrine of personal election to eternal life: a doctrine which is often spoken against, and not always well understood; which is a stumbling-block to many, and from which false inferences of a very dangerous tendency are frequently drawn. It is now proposed,

I. Briefly to state and prove this doctrine:

II. To guard against misconceptions of it; and,

III. To answer objections against it.

The scripture doctrine of election I understand to be this: That a certain number of mankind, including all who will actually be saved, were chosen of God to salvation from all eternity; in such an absolute manner, that it is impossible any one of them should finally be lost.

I mean not to enter largely into the proof of this point, at present; but only to give a concise view of the texts and arguments, on which my belief of it mainly rests.

We often read of an elect number of the fallen race of man, who were given to Christ in the covenant of redemption; and whom, in that covenant, he engaged effectually to save. These are promised him as the reward of his voluntary sufferings, Isa. liii. 10, 11, 12, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him

a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death." Of this chosen number our Saviour himself speaks; John xvii. 2, "Father, the hour is come: glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee; as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to *as many as thou hast given him.*" And ver. 6, "I have manifested thy name unto the men *whom thou gavest me out of the world.*" And ver. 9, "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for *them whom thou hast given me; for they are thine.*"

That the election of these was from eternity; out of many other proofs, see Eph. i. 3, 4, "Blessed be God, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him *before the foundation of the world.*" And 2 Tim. i. 9, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus *before the world began.*"

That none of those thus chosen, shall in anywise fail of salvation, is fully implied in the words of our Saviour, Matt. xxiv. 22, "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the *elect's* sake those days shall be shortened." And ver. 24, "For there shall be false Christs, and false prophets, who shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that, (if it were *possible*) they should deceive *the very elect.*"

And as this doctrine of the eternal election, to infallible salvation, of all such as will eventually be saved, is very expressly taught in the holy scriptures; so it may be infered, with great certainty, from the perfections of God. A being who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in wisdom and power, must be supposed to have designed from eternity, whatever he brings to pass in time. This is laid down as an undoubted maxim, Acts xv. 28th;

"Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world." If, therefore, the salvation of men be a work of God, he must have known from the beginning whom he would save; and this implies his determining to save them. For to say he knew that he should do what he had not determined to do, is a plain contradiction. And we have the application of this argument, to the eternal election of all who will be saved, in Rom. viii. 29, 30, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." And in Eph. i. 11, "Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." In these passages, the apostle concludes the salvation of all the saved, to have been predestinated and infallible, from the foreknowledge of God, and from his uncontrolable government of all events.

Thus the doctrine of election, however much disputed, stands upon the strong ground of the eternal covenant of redemption, the immutable perfections of God, and the express declarations of scripture.

II. We proceed to take notice of some misconceptions of this doctrine. And here,

1. It is certainly a wrong notion of it, to imagine that persons were chosen to salvation as the end; without being chosen to faith and holiness, as the necessary way and means. That "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and that "he that believeth not shall be damned," are the *revealed* decrees of heaven; and to suppose God hath any *secret* decrees, directly contrary to those which he has declared to us, is manifestly absurd. Accordingly,

the connection in which God always executes his decrees respecting the salvation of men, to prevent illusive hopes from this doctrine, is carefully ascertained to us in the holy scriptures. See Acts xiii. 48, "As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed." Rom. viii. 30, "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called." And 2 Thes. ii. 13, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." In vain do any expect to find hereafter their names written in heaven, unless they are created unto good works while here on earth. 'Christwill be the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him,' and to none else. Yet,

2. It is a wrong idea of this doctrine, to understand by it only a conditional election. We are not to think that God's electing persons to salvation, is nothing more than merely his determining that all those shall be saved who believe in Christ, and do the things which he says. If this were all, then, before saving faith, one sinner would be no more a chosen vessel of mercy than another. If this were all, it would, at best, have been left at utter uncertainty, whether a single soul of man would actually be saved. Christ might have no seed to serve him, and to reap the benefits of his obedience and death, notwithstanding such a mere conditional election. In that case, it is true, all to whom the gospel should come, would, in a sense, have been put into a salvable state: that is, under circumstances that they might be saved, unless it were their own fault. But, to what purpose is there a price in the hand of a fool, who hath no heart to improve it? The reprobate have such a price. If *they* were willing to be saved from their sins; and, in point of merit, to be wholly indebted to Christ, they might have life. To Jerusalem, when given over to destruction, our Saviour said, "How often would I have gathered thy chil-

dren together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" It is not enough that sinners be placed under circumstances that they might be saved, were it not their own fault: to secure their salvation, that must be done for them which will prevent their failing of it, through their own fault. This, therefore, God determined to do for a certain number. He determined to remove out of the way every possible, fatal obstacle to their salvation, moral, as well as natural. He determined to put a disposition into their hearts, as well as a price into their hands, to get wisdom, glory, honor, and immortality. He determined so to draw them, that they should come to Christ; and then to keep them by his power, from drawing back unto perdition. Many are the texts which are express to this purpose. Two such I will here recite: Psal. cx. 3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." And John vi. 37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." The first of these texts speaks of a people of Christ who were not yet his willing people; and it promises that they shall be willing. The last speaks of those given to Christ who had not as yet come to him; and it declares that they all shall come, and none of them be rejected. Surely, then, the election of these was not merely conditional: that if they were willing; if they would come to Christ, and abide in him, they should be saved. It was absolute; implying also that they should be willing; that they should come; that they should abide.

3. I think it is a wrong notion of the doctrine of election, to suppose that God's choice of persons as the heirs of grace and glory, was grounded on his foreknowledge of their faith and works. This, indeed, has been the opinion of many. They admit that God foreknew, from all eternity, which of

mankind would believe his word and obey his will: and that, in consequence of this his foreknowledge, he determined to give eternal life to these, and to no others.

But the inconsistency of this, and that it is not the scripture doctrine of election, may, I think, very easily be made evident.

(1.) It appears rational and necessary to believe, that God's foreknowledge of future events must be grounded on his decrees concerning them; and not his decreeing that things shall be, on his knowledge that they will be. To suppose otherwise, is to make the divine will dependant on creatures and events; and creatures and events independent on the divine will. It is also to suppose what is impossible, as implying a contradiction. God foreknows the voluntary actions of all creatures, because their hearts are in his hand, as much as the rivers of water, and he turneth them whithersoever he will. Were not this the case, it would be utterly inconceivable, if not evidently impossible, that God himself should foreknow how they would act. If there were not an antecedent, eternal certainty, what the actions of men would be, their actions could not be eternally foreknown: for to say that is foreknown, of which there is no certainty, must be a plain contradiction. An event must be certain, or it cannot certainly be known that it will ever be: but if there were an eternal certainty what the actions of creatures would be, that certainty must have had a cause; and that cause could be no other than the decree or purpose of Him who inhabits eternity; for other eternal cause, there could have been none.

Respecting the point in hand—the future faith and good works of those sinners that will be saved; there is no hypothesis on which they could possibly have been foreknown, without a divine predestination. On the supposition that men have a self-determining

power, to believe or not to believe; to obey or not to obey, as some hold; then, how they will be determined, and what they will do, must be previously uncertain; and therefore, not knowable. But going on the calvinistic supposition, that creatures have no such contingent, independent, self-determining power; and that unregenerate sinners have no *moral* power to believe to the saving of the soul, or to do any works truly good, by reason of the total depravity of their hearts; then, God must be supposed to foreknow that they will never any of them do these things, until he shall give them a new disposition. If he foresaw, therefore, that any number of them would cordially believe and obey the gospel, it must be because he determined to put such an heart in them. Consequently, his electing them to eternal life could not be grounded on his foreknowledge of their doing the things required in order to their salvation; but his foreknowledge that they would do these things, must have been grounded on his purpose to give them effectual grace; working in them to will and to do, of his good pleasure.

(2.) We are thus expressly taught in the holy scriptures: not that God elected some to everlasting life, because he foresaw they would become good, of their own mere motion; but that he chose the vessels of his mercy out of the common mass of fallen men, determining to make them good, by his own internal operation. See forecited Rom. viii. 29, "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Their conformity to Christ was an essential part of their predestination; and not the moving cause of their being predestinated. See also Eph. i. 4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Not because he foreknew we would, of ourselves, be thus holy and blameless.

(3.) To suppose that God's foreknowledge of the faith and holiness of the elect, was the ground of their election, is to explain away all the grace, designed to be glorified by this doctrine. The apostle in our text, you observe, speaks of a remnant according to the election of *grace*. And concerning Esau and Jacob, he takes notice of a declared preference given to the younger, before their birth; that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of *works*. But if the foreknowledge of men's good works had been the ground of it, why should it be called an election of grace? or why should care be taken to inform us of its being before the persons were born? There is no more grace in choosing men to salvation because of works certainly foreseen, than because of works already done. According to this conception of the matter, God never designed any distinction between the elect and the non-elect, only in consequence of their first making themselves to differ. But if it be thus of works, surely, it is no more grace.

The scripture doctrine of election, I think, is very evidently this: That God, of his mere goodness, and not out of respect to any works of their's, done or foreseen, elected a certain number of lost men as the subjects of his saving mercy; determining to give to them, and them only, first effectual grace, and finally immortal glory.

We will now, as was proposed,

III. Attend to the objections which are apt to arise in the minds of many, and which have often been made, against this doctrine.

1. Some may perhaps be ready to think, that for God to elect one and reprobate another, without reference to any difference between them in point of merit, is hardly consistent with his being impartially just.

To this, however, the answer is obvious. The salvation of sinners is not a matter of justice; that is, of debt. Fallen men, whose damnation is just, might all of them justly have been left to perish without hope. And if God saw fit to recover a part of them to holiness and happiness, and to leave the remainder to impenitence and perdition, these last have no injustice done them, any more than if all had been so left. Yet,

2. It may be thought that this doctrine of a limited election, and of such an infinite difference made between objects alike miserable, and alike unworthy, is irreconcilable, at least, with the equal goodness of God.

But this objection, as well as the foregoing, was particularly considered in my last discourse, as made against the doctrine of divine sovereignty in effectual calling; and it is needless now to repeat the answer then given. The substance of it was, that God may have good reasons for making these differences; and for making them exactly as he does. That a man often does more for one child, or one poor neighbor than another, without being influenced by partiality of kindness. That God hath as good a right, and it may as well consist with his equal benevolence, to bestow the blessings of saving grace, as the bounties of creation and Providence, with vast diversity, when the greater beauty and happiness of the collective whole, will thereby be promoted. That we cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection; but, from our limited view of the wisdom of his works and counsels, we have no reason to conclude, that in his most sovereign discriminations, there is not perfect impartiality of goodness, as well as of justice. But,

3. The grand objection against the doctrine now insisted on is, that it makes the doings of men of no

consequence, relative to their being saved or not; and has a direct tendency, therefore, to encourage them in carelessness and sin. Some seem to think, that if this doctrine be true a man may well say, Whether I read and hear the word, and ever so earnestly implore divine mercy, or cast off fear and restrain prayer, and live in the total neglect of all the means of grace and duties of religion: whether I be honest and just, chaste and temperate, or lie and steal, and indulge myself in all the pleasures of licentiousness and debauchery, it will make no alteration. If I am elected, I shall certainly be saved, do what I will: if I am of the non-elect, I shall inevitably be damned, do what I can. I will therefore get what I am able of this world's goods, lawfully or unlawfully, taking no thought for the world to come.

This looks self-evident and unanswerable: in reply to it, however, it may be observed,

(1.) Few draw a similar inference from the general doctrine of divine decrees, and venture to act upon it, in things pertaining to the present life. Men will labor hard for the meat which perisheth, and give themselves no rest that they may join house to house, and lay field to field; they will be careful to keep out of danger, and to use means for the recovery or preservation of their health; though they are told and believe, that the bounds of their habitations and the number of their days are determined, over which they cannot pass. Why then should the doctrine of election make men careless respecting the salvation of their souls? If it has such an effect upon any, it must be because they have little faith respecting a future state; or because religion is a business from any serious attention to which they desire to be excused. It may be answered,

(2.) If men believe the Bible, whether they believe the doctrine of election or not, they must be

persuaded that it is not all one, do what they will or can, in regard to their being saved or lost for ever. Nothing is more plainly revealed in the word of God, than that life and death are now set before us; and that, as we choose and conduct here, so it will fare with us hereafter. Out of a multitude of texts express to this purpose, See Gal. vi. 7, 8, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." And 2 Cor. v. 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." I answer,

(3.) It no more follows from the doctrine of election, than from the doctrine of God's universal foreknowledge, that whatever men do can make no alteration in regard to their being saved. What is foreknown, will as inevitably come to pass, as what is decreed. A divine decree cannot make an event more certain, than it must be if infallibly foreknown. What was objected in the former case, may just as truly be said in this: If God knows I shall be saved, I certainly shall. If he knows I shall not be saved, certainly I shall not. We answer, therefore,

(4.) It doth not follow from either of these doctrines, that a man will be saved, let him do ever so ill, all his days; or that any one will be damned, let him do ever so well. It follows indeed from the doctrine of election, and equally from that of divine foreknowledge, that there is an absolute certainty who will be saved, and who will not: but from neither of these doctrines doth it follow, that it is all one whether men properly attend to, or wholly neglect the means of their salvation. An event may

be certain, and yet the use of proper means in order to it, be not at all the less necessary. An event may be certain, and yet it may be certain that it will never come to pass, except in one particular way. And this, we are expressly told, is the case respecting the elect's being saved. They are chosen to salvation, *through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.* Certainly, therefore, it is not all one whether they believe the truth, and are sanctified; or believe a lie, and are hardened in sin. Nor is it a matter of no consequence, whether they use or neglect, the appointed means of faith and sanctification. Let it only be well remembered that the *end* is not decreed, unconnectedly with the *way* and *means;* and any one may easily see, that there is no just encouragement from the doctrine of election, to iniquity or negligence; nor any discouragement from seeking the kingdom of God, and striving to enter in at the strait gate.

It only remains that we consider how this doctrine should be treated, and to what good purposes it may be improved.

Certainly, we ought not to treat it with silent contempt, or total neglect. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us, and to our children for ever." Whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world, is one of the former things. Who are of the election of grace, until their effectual calling make it sure, is a secret which we cannot by searching find out; and concerning which we have no business to form any judgment or conjecture. For persons to frighten and discourage themselves with gloomy apprehensions that they are not of the elect; or, on the other hand, for any to make themselves easy with the fond imagination of their being of that happy number, is to

exercise themselves in matters too high for them; and will be likely to do them hurt, rather than any good. But the general doctrine, that God hath elected some to everlasting life, and not others, is a thing plainly revealed. This therefore, it belongs to us to understand and believe.

Some, who acknowledge that this is a scripture doctrine, seem yet to be of opinion that it should not be preached; because many are apt to be stumbled and offended at it, and many others may be in danger of wresting it, to their destruction. It may possibly be insisted upon too often, I admit, to the neglect of other subjects equally important. It may doubtless be thrown out in too unguarded a manner; in a manner tending only to disgust, without instructing them that oppose themselves; or in a manner that will be likely to lead the believers of it into misconceptions, or wrong inferences. It may, perhaps, be sometimes discoursed upon without being thoroughly understood, or sufficiently studied. But that any who believe it a doctrine of the Bible, and a true doctrine, should think it ought *never* to be preached, however convincingly, however guardedly, appears strange! How such can reconcile the total omission of it, with the duty of an able minister of the New-Testament, I do not readily conceive. Paul says, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." He means, undoubtedly, the whole gospel, as well as nothing but the gospel: for he said to the elders of Ephesus, "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare *all* the counsel of God." Why then should ministers nowadays be thought at liberty to insist only on such doctrines of scripture as they judge to be of good tendency; omitting wholly those hard sayings which the carnal mind may be ready to dispute, or likely to pervert and misimprove!

It hath now been fully shown, I apprehend, that the election of grace is a part, and, from the frequent repetition of it, we have reason to suppose it an essential part, of the revealed counsel of God. It may also be observed, that there is the more need of its being insisted upon, for the very reason why some would not have it ever handled; viz. because it is so apt to stumble and offend people, or to be wrested by them to bad purposes. The admonition of God to his prophets of old, applies with particular force to this difficult point; Isa. lvii. 14, "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people." Those who search the scriptures, will find this doctrine there, whether it be ever preached to them or not; and may be in danger of wresting it, or rejecting revelation on account of it. The unstable and unlearned, may not know how to get over the difficulties attending it, and to guard against the supposed consequences of it, which have really a fatal tendency, except some man should guide them.

But it is not a doctrine which needs to be preached upon, merely to prevent its doing hurt. It was doubtless revealed for doing some good: and, according to what has now been said, there are several useful purposes to which it is capable of being improved. Particularly,

1. Christians may hence be taught humility and self-abasement. The natural tendency of it is to hide pride from man, and to advance the glory of divine grace. God reminded his ancient covenant people, that he did not choose them for their sakes; that is, because of any thing inviting in them, or because they were great and honorable; for they were the least and most despised of all nations. And in like manner it should ever be remembered by christians, that when God elected them to be his redeemed ones, they were absolutely nothing; and that when he be-

gun a good work in them, they were infinitely worse than nothing.

2. This doctrine affords an animating encouragement to exertions for the salvation of sinners; even in the darkest times, and when there is the least human prospect of any success. When the gospel is openly rejected by many; and when its peculiar doctrines are opposed by many more, and seem to be falling into general disregard and contempt. When iniquity abounds, and the professed love of religion waxes cold. When forsaking religious assemblies is the manner of some, and very little attention in them is the manner of almost all. When such is the case in particular societies, or generally in a land, the consolation in our text still remains. As it was in the days of Elijah, and as it was among the Jews in the days of Paul, "Even so at this time, there is a remnant according to the election of grace." And this is sufficient encouragement for faithful ministers, patiently to labor and suffer. Says the apostle to Timothy; "I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

3. Hence no sinner has reason to look upon his own case as altogether hopeless, as long as this life lasts. Were it not for the doctrines of election, and of divine sovereignty in effectual calling—the doctrine that an unknown number will infallibly be saved, and that God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, a sinner fully sensible of his total depravity, might well sink in utter despair. But in this valley of Achor—in the depth of legal humiliation, there is thence a door of hope.

4. Hence those who entertain a more comfortable hope, from an apprehension that a work of special grace is actually begun in them, should still give dil-

igence to make their calling and election sure. It is a great thing to be certain of one's election to eternal life. The only way to put this out of doubt and uncertainty, is to be sure of one's effectual calling; and to be sure of this, so as not to be deceived, is a difficult thing. Subtil is the grand deceiver. Deceitful is the human heart. Many are the ways of fatal self-deception. The apostle to the Hebrews, having given an awful warning of the terrible consequence of apostacy, after hopeful good beginnings, says, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." This charitable persuasion was grounded on the good fruits which had been seen in many of them. Nevertheless he adds, "And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end." Frequent are such exhortations to the most hopeful professors. I shall conclude with one of these; 2 Cor. xiii. 5, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

SERMON XVI.

ON REGENERATION.

EPHESIANS II. 10.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

IT is of importance that good men should know, and be ever ready to acknowledge, that all their goodness is from God; and that for this, as well as for pardon and justification, they are indebted to free grace. This is the doctrine here inculcated upon the Ehpesian christians. Having spoken of the resurrection of Christ by the mighty power of God, the apostle begins this chapter with sying, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And he goes on to remind them of the extreme vileness and wretchedness of their former condition and character; when, according to the general course of this fallen world, they had walked in all manner of evil ways, under the guidance of the first grand apostate, who was the assumed and chosen God of rebel men. This was said to those who had lately been converted from the laciviousness, debaucheries, and abominable idolatries of Paganism: but the apostle freely confesses that even the Jews, of whom he himself was one, were no better by na-

ture than the heathen, nor less the heirs of divine wrath. That the recovery of either of them to a state of holiness, and to the hope of heavenly happiness, was of the rich mercy and wonderful love of God. To impress more deeply upon them, a proper sense that their whole salvation was of free grace, he observes that the only thing in them whereby they became entitled to it, was believing in Christ; and that a heart thus to believe had been given them, and was not of their own acquirement; that this gift was before they could have done any thing to the glory of God, inasmuch as they were at that very time first made capable of any works truly good; and that to all the works of righteousness which they would ever be able to do, they had been freely predestinated long before. See ver. 8, 9, and the whole of ver. 10, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

The doctrine in our text, intended for present discussion, is only this,

That fallen men must be new-created, before they can do any works truly good.

It is proposed, in the ensuing discourse,

I. To explain this doctrine:

II. To prove it; and,

III. To answer objections.

In the first place, I shall endeavor to explain the doctrine by showing wherein this new creation consists; or what prerequisite to good words is so totally

wanting in man by nature, as to need being created anew.

It is common to speak of the original depravity of human nature as being *universal*; and of regeneration as a *universal* change: and so much do some love to deal in generals only, that nothing particular can be learnt from them, on either of these subjects. It is indeed true, that both native depravity, and renewing grace, have an extensive influence; even over the whole man, soul and body. But yet, certain it is, that man was not universally annihilated by the fall; and that the renewing of the Holy Ghost is not a proper, universal, new creation. Here then, in order to a clearer understanding of the matter, it may be useful briefly to notice a few negative particulars.

1. It is very certain that no faculties, members or senses of body, necessary for the performance of good works, are the things totally wanting in all men by nature, or the things created anew in regeneration. Probably our bodies are weaker now, and their senses less perfect, than they might have been if sin had not entered into the world, and death by sin: but most men have still bodies good enough to be capable of many good external actions, if nothing else were wanting: nor have men other or better bodily eyes, or ears, or tongues, or hands, or feet, when they are made new creatures by being born again, than those they had before: though they use them in another and better manner.

2. The same may be said of the mental capacity of understanding. This faculty may be much impaired by vicious courses, and is alway darkened in wicked men because of the blindness of their heart. It is certain, however, that no natural men, except idiots, or such as are quite delirious, are totally incapable of good works for want of understanding. And it is probable that even natural fools and distract-

ed persons, are rarely if ever so radically destitute of reason, but that they might be made rational without a new creation. Nor are the mere intellectual powers of men new-made, or mended, by regeneration, any more than their bodily senses and members. There is only a new turn and direction given them. As the same feet which were before swift to mischief, are now turned unto God's testimonies, and run in the way of his commandments: as the same hands which perhaps stole before, are now employed in honest labor, and in giving to him that needeth: as the same eyes and ears which were attentive only to vanities, are now turned with delightful engagedness, day and night, to the words of eternal life: as the same tongue that used deceit, and mouth that was full of cursing and bitterness, are now exercised in prayer and parise, and in edifying communications; so the same understanding faculty which before made one wise to do evil, now enables him to know and do those things that are good.

3. The power of will, requisite for moral agency, is not the capacity which is procreated in regeneration.

By this we mean, the power of being pleased with some things, and displeased with others; of inclining to the former, and turning with aversion from the latter: of choosing one way or the other, according to one's own mind. Should a creature be of such an unfeeling make as not to be capable of liking or disliking at all, or of being inclined or disinclined to any thing; such a creature would be unfinished, as a free agent; and must be further created, before he could act at all. And if this power of will should be wholly lost in one once endowed with it, there would be a necessity of its being created in him again, before he would be capable of any actions, good or evil.

But this is not the deficiency in natural men. They have will enough. They can love and hate;

they can choose and refuse, just as they are disposed: and, therefore, might do good, very easily, if it were only agreeable to them.

4. There is a mental sense, called in scripture conscience, which is common to all men; and is no part of the creation unto good works, spoken of in our text.

This is a sense, which has reference to moral subjects only: that is, to things right or wrong in moral agents; true or false in doctrines; just or unjust in laws, and their sanctions. It is something different, I conceive, from a mere habit of thinking, contracted by education or custom: and something different from the bare capacity of forming a true judgment. It helps us much in judging of ourselves what is right; but it is not a man's judgment itself, or the mere capacity of forming a rational and right opinion. That faculty resides in the head; this appears to have its seat in the breast. That only sees; this feels. Conscience has always feeling, more or less: it is therefore properly a mental *sense;* and as it respects matters of morality only, it may with propriety be called, the *moral* sense.

But this, whatever it be called, and whether absolutely necessary to moral agency or not, is certainly common to men. It is what we mean by *common sense*, to which an appeal is so often made; supposing that its decision will be the same in all, and always agreeable to truth, when things are fairly stated and fully understood. Habits of vice, or of inattention, may weaken this sense for a time; it is yet alive, however, and, on some occasions, will bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder, in the most hardened sinners. We read of some who were past feeling, and whose conscience was seared; but we are never told of any who had no conscience at all. On the contrary, of himself and other preachers of the gospel, the apostle says, 2 Cor. iv. 1, 2, "Seeing we

have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to *every man's conscience*, in the sight of God." He plainly supposes that no man was wholly destitute of conscience; the most stupid heathen not excepted.

Thus far then, human nature, in its deepest depravity, is not so sunk—so perfectly annihilated, in any respect, as to need new-creating. But, besides all the powers and senses required to constitute man a rational, voluntary, and conscious agent; something further is necessary to his actually performing good works: namely, a good *disposition*. This, we suppose to be wholly wanting in mankind, as born of the flesh; and to be the thing created radically anew, when any are born of the Spirit. A man will not, and cannot act right, as long as he is not so disposed; however capable he may be of willing and acting agreeably to his own mind. "The vile person *will* speak villany, and his heart *will* work iniquity." "A corrupt tree *cannot* bring forth good fruit." A man's ways, and words, and thoughts, will naturally be vicious, as long as his heart is totally destitute of virtue. But should one perform some painful duties, from merely selfish motives, these would not be good works. "For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly," says the apostle, "neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew which is one inwardly: and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God." And again, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Nor can any doctrine be more evidently agreeable to reason and common sense, than these declarations of scripture. A wicked man, from sin-

ister views, may do things which are useful to others, and by which God is glorified in the eyes of the godly; but, not having the glory of God at heart, nor the good of others, these things cannot, in him, be acts of true piety, or real virtue. There must be a disposition to love God and our neighbor as the divine law requires—there must be a principle of righteousness and true holiness—of impartial, disinterested, universal benevolence, or the most specious deeds are no other than dead works. And this principle—this disposition, we suppose, is the thing, the only thing, which is properly *created*, in regeneration. But, the mind being the standard of the man, when one is thus renewed in the spirit of his mind, it may be truly said, "He is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."

Having explained, I hope sufficiently, the doctrine of our text, we will now,

II. Attend to the evidences of its being a true doctrine.

That regeneration is such an essential change of nature, as supposes something created, in a proper and strict sense, we have reason to believe,

1. From the phrases by which this great change is commonly denoted, in the holy scriptures.

It is expressly spoken of under the name and notion of a creation, in a number of places. Besides the text now insisted on, see Eph. iv. 24, "The new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Col. iii. 10, "The new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him." And 2 Cor. v. 17, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."

We may also observe, that most if not all the other phrases, by which this change is expressed,

plainly convey the same idea of it, and of the manner in which it is effected. God speaks of it in the Old Testament under the notion of his giving a new heart to his impenitent people in Babylon: a heart to repent and turn to him, with the tender feelings of godly sorrow. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." In our context it is represented as a resurrection from spiritual death: ver. 4, 5, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." Now, to be thus quickened, or to have such a new heart given, evidently supposes the proper creating of a vital principle of religion—a godly disposition. But the most common phrases used to express this change of heart, are regeneration, and a second birth. See John iii. 3, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And ver. 6, 7, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." And Tit. iii. 5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." These last phrases evidently allude to the beginning of our existence, by ordinary generation and natural birth. They evidently imply that a new creature, or created thing, is brought into being; and that the moral image of God is thus immediately given us; as, in the first generation and birth, we derived the natural likeness of our earthly parents immediately from them. Nor is it possible to have any idea of being thus spiritually begotten and born, without supposing a proper work of creation. God is a

Spirit; and how shall we conceive of a new creature's proceeding from Him, otherwise than as being created? To be begotten or born of God, and to be created of God, are phrases which necessarily convey the very same idea, if any at all. Accordingly, we are said to be the *offspring* of God, because we proceeded from him in our original creation.

I am sensible that all the forementioned phrases and expressions, are supposed by some to be used on this subject, in so very figurative a sense, as to have scarce any proper meaning. They are figurative, it is true: that is, they allude to natural things, by which the spiritual change designed is meant to be illustrated. But if they are figures of speech pertinently used, there must be some analogy between the metaphorical and literal sense of the expressions; and so much of an analogy, certainly, as will imply, that a new creature is really produced, in the moral likeness of God; which can be no other than a proper spiritual creation.

2. What is said of the wonderful display of divine power in effecting this change, necessarily leads us to conclude that it must be properly a supernatural work. See Eph. i. 19, 20, "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." The work in believers here refered to, is plainly regeneration; because it is directly after said, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And that the apostle would have us conceive of this as being a supernatural work, is evident, both from his comparing it to God's raising to life the dead body of Christ; and from the strong expressions thrown together to set forth the extraordinary energy of God herein conspicuous. The *exceeding greatness* of his power; and the working of his *mighty* power. The

omnipotence of the Deity is exercised, indeed, in bringing to pass the most ordinary events. Whatever diversities of operations there are, "it is the same God that worketh all in all." But in supernatural works, the divine power, whether more exerted or not, is more illustriously manifested. In the language of scripture, in the latter kind of events, "the arm of the Lord is made bare."

To be universally understood, it may here be needful, perhaps, to explain the difference between a natural and a supernatural work. In order to this it must be observed, that there are certain established laws of nature, according to which natural effects are brought to pass: and there are certain powers of created agents, by the exertion of which these effects may be produced. Attraction, for instance, is a general law in the material system. Hence it is that bodies heavier than the air, naturally fall in it to the earth. It was God that established this law at first, and it is he that keeps it still in force; so that a stone falls not to the ground without his agency. But we are not at all surprized at it: the stone falls, we say, of itself, or by its own weight. Heavy bodies may also be thrown upward naturally, by the strength or art of man. But should we see rocks, or pieces of led fly up into the air without any visible cause, it would be thought something supernatural; and would be marvellous in our eyes. Thus, when Moses and Aaron did what the magicians could not do with their enchantments, the latter were constrained to say, "This is the finger of God." So the dividing the Red Sea by the rod of Moses, and the river Jordan by the mantle of Elijah: Elisha's causing iron to swim, Ezekiel's raising dry bones into a living army, and our Saviour's calling Lazarus out of his grave, after he had been dead four days: these, and things like these, which are not according to the laws of nature, and not to be effected by the power of crea-

tures, are called supernatural works of God. And this distinction of natural and supernatural, is as applicable to effects in the intellectual, as in the material world. There are certain tendencies in minds, to be actuated by certain motives set before them; and when a man's mind is influenced, or altered, by arguments and inducements suited to work such an effect, on one of such a disposition, the effect is natural. But should a man be made to act contrary to every previous propensity of his nature, or should a principle of action radically new, at any time be given him, such an effect must be altogether supernatural. Such an effect must be as *immediately* from the power of God, as the reanimation of a body which had been ever so long lifeless, or as the original creation of all things.

Now in this view of the change in an unregenerate sinner, when he is first transformed by the renewing of his mind, and in no other, can I see a propriety in what the apostle says, of the exceeding greatness of God's power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power in Christ when he raised him from the dead. On this supposition, and this alone, both these effects, though the subjects of them were different, must be alike by the *immediate* operation of Omnipotence.

3. If it be true that man is by nature totally depraved in the spirit of his mind, it is a plain case that the beginning of holiness in him, can be no otherwise than by a new creation. When spiritual life is once begun in the soul, in however low a degree, it may be preserved and increased by moral means; as well as any plant or animal can be kept alive, and made to grow by natural means. But the first production of the radical principle of this life, can no more be the effect of any second cause; than the first root or seed of any plant or tree, could have been produced by rain, sun-shine, and cultivation

Those who hold that regeneration is effected by the moral power of light and truth, either leave true holiness wholly out of the account from first to last; or suppose mankind not totally destitute of it by nature: or else talk in a manner altogether inconsistent.

Some suppose that the enmity of the carnal mind against God is owing only to misapprehensions concerning him; and, consequently, that carnal men are immediately reconciled to him, as soon as they have right information respecting his character and ways. But this supposes that their hearts were never totally depraved, if depraved at all. It supposes no more depravity in them before conversion than after. They now love God because they are convinced that he is holy, just, and good; and all that ever occasioned their disaffection to him, was their conceiving him to be of an opposite character, and such a being as no one ought to love.

Others imagine that the only thing which excites enmity against God in natural men, is their thinking him their enemy, or one that is angry with them, and will terribly punish them: accordingly, when once they are made to believe he loves them, has pardoned them, and that it is his good pleasure to give them glory, honor, and immortality in his heavenly kingdom; all their enmity is slain, and they are full of gratitude and love to him. But this supposes, either that their hearts were good before, or that they are not so still. If they thought he was angry with them without a cause, and would punish them unjustly, or with cruel severity; if their hearts rose against him in these views only, and if these wrong apprehensions did not proceed from something previously wrong in themselves, there was no moral depravity in the case. Their hearts might always have been good. But if a belief of God's just anger, and a fear of his righteous vengeance, excited their enmi-

ty against him; and if a confident persuasion that he hath pardoned them, and designs their eternal happiness, is all that now reconciles them to him, they may remain totally depraved still, notwithstanding such reconciliation.

Others speak of a mysterious spiritual light, let into the carnal mind, which changes the heart of a sinner, and makes him holy. But an apostle hath said, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,—neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." And nothing can be more irrational, or more evidently absurd, than supposing that a totally depraved sinner should see the holy nature and ways of God, with any cordial complacency. Seeing divine things as they are spiritually discerned, supposes a previous conformity to them in the spirit of one's mind. Indeed, the perfections, and laws, and works of God, may be manifested in such a light to the wickedest man in the world, as to force the feeling approbation of his *conscience:* but this is a very different thing from that delightful perception of them which is peculiar to holy beings. This constrained approbation of conscience, can never make a creature good, who had no goodness before. The devils thus feel, as well as believe, that God is holy in all his ways and righteous in all this works; but this can only make them tremble and hate: it will never, to all eternity, excite in them any love to him, or transform them at all into his moral likeness.

It is easy to conceive that whatever propensities of nature one previously has, may be brought into exercise by arguments and motives, adapted to operate upon such propensities. It is easy to conceive that a sinner's selfish fears may be awakened by the terrors of the law; and that his selfish hopes and gratitude may be highly raised by the grace of the gospel. Self-love may be wrought upon by the power of light and truth, or of delusion and falsehood,

in a thousand different forms: but how to bring into existence a propensity of nature, or principle of action radically new, and essentially different from every thing in the native mind of man, is the great difficulty. If it be true, as an opposer of the present doctrine has once admitted, "that a principle of heavenly virtue is dead, and the root of it perished, in the heart of fallen men;" it is a plain case, I think, that it can never be brought to life, otherwise than, by being, in a proper and strict sense, *created* in them again.

We will now attend, as was proposed,

III. To objections against this doctrine.

1. If any one should object, that a work truly supernatural, is a real miracle; but to call regeneration a miracle, is not common, nor proper:

To such an objector my reply would be; that by miracles are commonly meant, not all supernatural works, but such only as are designed for the proof of inspiration, or of an immediate divine mission. And in order to their being adapted to this end, it is necessary that they should be evident to the senses of men: whereas regeneration is invisible; being a work in the hidden man of the heart. Hence, should one who says he has an immediate call to the gospel ministry, alledge, as an evidence of it, that many souls have been converted by his preaching, and call this working miracles; it would be impertinent: it would give no conviction, except to very weak enthusiasts; since the real regeneration of his supposed converts, is a thing as invisible, as uncertain, and unknowable, as his inward heavenly call itself. For this reason it is improper to give the name of a miracle to regeneration: not because it is a less supernatural work than raising the dead, or calling any thing that was not, into existence.

But there are objections to be considered, much more serious than this.

2. I have seen it objected, that to suppose a change effected in the heart of man, otherwise than by the power of moral means, is palpably absurd; as implying an evident impossibility in the nature of things. It has been said, by a divine of advanced age, and good sense; "The moral change of the mind in regeneration, is of an essentially different kind from the mechanical change of the body, when that is raised from the dead; and must be effected by the exertion of a different kind of power. Each effect requires a power suited to its nature: and the power proper for one can never produce the other. To argue from one to the other of these effects, as the apostle has been misunderstood to do, in Eph. i. 20, is therefore idle and impertinent.—The Spirit of God is possessed of these two kinds of power, and exerts the one or the other, accordingly as he wills to produce a change of the moral or physical kind, in moral beings or inanimate matter."

But to this philosophical objection, however plausible and unanswerable it may appear, I think the reply of our Saviour to the difficulty started by the Sadducees, respecting the resurrection and a future state, is neither idle nor impertinent: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of *God*." The Almighty is not limited, as men are, to these two modes of operation, by moral and mechanical means. The Spirit of God is possessed of a power of working in a manner different from either of these; that is, supernaturally. The means by which effects are brought to pass in a natural way, must indeed be different; according to the nature of those effects, and of the subjects on which the operations are performed: but when once we admit the idea of a work properly supernatural—an effect

produced not by the power of any means at all, we instantly lose sight of all distinctions in the kind of power, or manner of working, adapted to things of different natures. When God, by his omnipotent word alone, called all nature into being at first, are we to suppose that he exerted different powers, according to the natures of the things designed to be created; and that the power proper to create inanimate matter, could never create a thinking mind! Are we to conceive that angels and the souls of men were persuaded into being, by arguments and motives; and that the material world was forced out of nothing, by the power of attraction! So, in regard to quickening the dead, are we to imagine that God can give new life to a soul dead in sin, only by moral suasion; and that, if he will reanimate bodies which have slept thousands of years in the dust of the earth, he has no other way to do it than by a physical operation! The body of Christ was raised to life, I should suppose, not by any mechanical power, but supernaturally. In this manner God always works, when he quickeneth the dead, and calleth things that are not as though they were. And what absurdity can there be in supposing Him able to give a new principle of action, as well as to give existence to any thing else, in this immediate manner?

Some sound and sensible divines, it must be granted, in order to guard against the notion of regeneration's being effected by moral suasion, have called it a physical work, and a physical change; but very needlessly, I apprehend, and with very evident impropriety. The change is moral: the work producing it, is neither moral nor physical; but supernatural.

3. The next objection to which we will attend, is grounded on scripture. It may be said, Admitting that God is able to change the hearts of men by his own power alone; yet we are plainly taught that the fact is otherwise; and that regeneration is

actually by the *power of means.* The apostle Paul says to the Corinthians, "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you *through the gospel.*" The apostle James, having said, "Every good gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," adds, "Of his own will begat he us *with the word of truth.*" And the apostle Peter tells christians of their "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *by the word of God.*"

To this objection, the common answer is, that these texts may be understood as refering to the whole change from sin to holiness; including that part of it in which the soul is active, as well as that wherein it is passive: and it is admitted on all hands, that active conversion is by the moral power of truth.

But, if any should not be satisfied with this, another answer may be given, which appears to me quite sufficient and unexceptionable. We may understand the apostles in these passages to mean only, that regeneration is by the word, as other supernatural works are represented to have been wrought by men and means. That God is wont to change the hearts of men, under the dispensation of the word of truth, we readily grant: but that a new heart is given them by the power of the word, these texts, we apprehend, do not determine. Ezekiel was directed to prophesy over a valley of dry bones, and to say unto them, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." And as he prophsied, "there was a noise, and a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone: and, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above." Again, he was commanded to prophesy unto the wind, and to say, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live." And while he was prophesying, "the breath came into them, and they lived and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

But will any one undertake to explain philosophically, how all this was effected by the sound of the prophet's voice, or by the force of what he said; however divinely impressed upon these bones, and upon the wind? No one will imagine but that such an event as was represented in this vision, must have been as perfectly supernatural, as if there had been no prophesying, nor any prophet in the case. And no more need we suppose that it is in the power of preaching, to give spiritual life to souls dead in sin, because we read of men's being begotten through the gospel, and born again by the word. Most of the supernatural works recorded in the scriptures both of the Old and New-Testament, are represented to have been wrought in consequence of certain words and actions of men: and if any insist upon the very particles of speech, instances are not wanting in which the most undisputed miracles are expressly said to be done *by* men, and *through* the instrumentality of means. See Acts v. 12, "*By* the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." Acts viii. 18, "*Through* the laying on of the apostle's hands, the Holy Ghost was given." And Acts xix. 11, "God wrought special miracles *by* the hand of Paul." In such a sense as this, it is not denied that sinners are regenerated by the means of grace, and through the ministry of the word. In this sense Paul might truly say, he had begotten the believing Corinthians through the gospel; though the operation of God in giving them a right spirit, were ever so properly supernatural. This, I think, is a fair and full answer to the objection grounded on any such texts as the foregoing: and it may prepare the way for answering the next objection to be noticed.

4. It is objected, that if supernatural grace be necessary, before sinners can be brought to love God, and obey the gospel, to preach to them, or use any

means with them for their salvation, must be utterly in vain, and can answer no valuable end. I have seen this objection insisted upon in the following strong terms. "The necessary consequence of this doctrine is, that it is to no more purpose to urge gospel truths and motives on unconverted men, to persuade them to be reconciled to God, than it is to reason with a madman with a view to cure him of his distraction; and that the gospel ministry, as it respects the unconverted, is the vainest, foolishest, and absurdest thing in the whole world."

But to this, though strongly urged, the answer is easy. For,

(1.) The means appointed to be used with sinners, have a proper tendency to do some things which are necessary in order to their salvation; though they cannot renew them in the spirit of their minds, nor reconcile them to God before they are renewed. Sinners must have some knowledge and convictions of certain truths, or they cannot be saved in the gospel way: and the word of truth, if rightly divided, is well adapted to give them this knowledge, and these convictions. "By the law is the knowledge of sin:" by the gospel is the knowledge of salvation for sinners. The law is necessary to kill the self-righteous hopes of natural men; the gospel, to keep them from sinking in utter despair. Both are very useful for discovering to sinners their utter inexcusableness, and at the same time their total helplessness in themselves; and thus to make them sensible of their perishing need of a Saviour, and of a Sanctifier. In this view it is of importance that the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, should be revealed from heaven, and be clearly set before their eyes; as this will have a tendency to put some check upon them in their careless, sinful courses, and to awaken their attention to the things which belong to their peace.

In this view it is of importance that duty should be urged upon them, in all its various branches, external and internal: that the commandment, in all its breadth and length, should be clearly illustrated to them as holy, just, and good. In this view it is of importance that the gospel of peace should be truly explained; that the reasonableness of its terms, and the riches of its grace, should be fully evinced, and that sinners should be earnestly exhorted and entreated, in this way, to be reconciled to God. The natural tendency of all this, under only the impressive influence of the Holy Spirit, is to bring the unconverted to a conviction of their sin and danger; of their duty and impotency; and so to prepare them for the grace of God which bringeth salvation. By these means the sinner's refuges of lies and hiding places of falsehood are swept away. By these means the vain imaginations of the unregenerate, respecting their own goodness or their ability to become good, are cast down; which is one thing needful in order to their building upon the sure foundation laid in Zion. By means of the moral power of gospel truth, sinners are also actually reconciled to God, through repentance and faith in Christ, when their recovery to a right spirit, by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, is once begun.

Now, since the awakening, the conviction, and the actual conversion of men, is thus effected by the proper influence of light and truth; we can see good reason why the forementioned means were appointed, and ought to be used. But,

(2.) If *we* could see no tendency in the instituted means of grace, to do any thing relative to the salvation of the unconverted; yet God who is wonderful in counsel and incomprehensible in working, might well be supposed to have sufficient reasons for their institution and use. He had reasons, undoubtedly, for employing men and prescribing means,

when he would work those wonders of old which all christians allow to have been entirely supernatural. If changing the dispositions of men were all that was necessary for their salvation, still, consistently with the doctrine now maintained, we could understand why God would have the law and gospel preached to them, as well as we can why he ordered that the priests, bearing the ark, and blowing with trumpets, should go round the city of Jericho seven days, when he would break down the walls of that strong fortification. And as well as we can why the Syrian nobleman was directed to wash seven times in the river Jordan, for the miraculous cure of his leprosy. Naaman objected, indeed, and thought this prescription of the prophet, no doubt, one of the foolishest, vainest, and absurdest things in the world. He said, "Are Abana and Parphar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." Nevertheless, upon being better advised, he tried the experiment, and found a cure.

The propriety of our using means divinely ordained, depends not upon their having in them any power or virtue adequate to the end proposed. Whether the expected effect be natural, or supernatural, alters nothing: in either case, a divine efficiency is required; and our encouragement, is the intimation of His good pleasure who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. If we have a commission and charge from Him, to urge gospel truths and duties on unconverted men, as the means of their salvation, although we consider them, in regard to spiritual life, as fitly represented by a valley of dry bones, it is not irrational for us to do as we are commanded; to tell them what must be believed and done by them, and to call upon them to hear the word of the Lord: because He who quickeneth the dead, can give them a hearing ear, and an understanding heart; and because we have more reason

to hope that he will do this, when these means are used with them, than when they are neglected.

5. There is one more objection, which, though it often occurs, and has often been answered, ought not perhaps to be wholly passed over in this place. It may be objected that God's treatment of the unregenerate in his word, is not consistent with the doctrine of their being incapable of good works, until, by his supernatural power and sovereign grace, they are created anew. He not only calls upon them to awake out of sleep, and arise from the dead, as our Saviour called to Lazarus to come forth out of his grave; but he seriously exhorts, and authoritatively commands all men to repent and believe; yea, to be perfect; and threatens to punish them eternally for every failure of obedience to the law of sinless perfection, as well as for non-compliance with the terms of the gospel. But how can such exhortations, commands, and threatenings, be reasonable or just, provided the unregenerate are under a real inability to do any good works?

This some have attempted to answer one way and some another; and some have frankly confest that there is a mystery in it which they know not how to solve. The most common answer has formerly been, that we were disabled for holy obedience by the fall, which was our own fault; and that God has not lost his right to command, because man hath thus lost his ability to obey. A late writer of no inconsiderable genius or learning, whose books are circulating among us, seems still rather inclined to adopt this old solution; though he is not altogether satisfied with it, excepting as applied to the first man, who was created perfect originally unto all good works, and lost this power by his own personal fault. He says, "It is because man has disabled himself from doing his duty, that we argue the inexcusableness, and sinfulness of his moral inability."

And he quotes a worthy ancient divine as saying; "If any way could have been supposed, how Adam could have been bereft of that holiness he was created in, without a precedaneous act of sinning as the cause, then indeed we might have said that privation of holiness should not have been reckoned sin either to himself or his posterity in that case." That is, if Adam had not sinned before he was unholy, his being unholy would have been no sin! But, after this quotation, our modern author adds; "That Adam should be subject to an habitual inability with respect to his duty, and yet be held bound to the performance of it, is not so hard to conceive. But that this inability and corruption should be propagated to his posterity, and have the same effects and consequences in them, is a point of vast difficulty; and is perhaps the Gordian-knot in revealed religion. And yet the experience of the world in all ages has extorted a general acknowledgment of the depravity of human nature: and the scriptures plainly assert and constantly suppose it. They represent man in his natural state as destitute of both a will and power for such acts as are spiritually good: that he is unable to will and do duties in a holy manner, until by supernatural and special grace he is enabled and persuaded thereto; and yet charge him with sin and guilt for every deviation from that perfection which the divine law requires. Upon the testimony of God in his word, my faith rests satisfied, without pretending to see through those difficulties, which the sacred writers have not, that I remember, once attempted to solve."

Such modesty undoubtedly becomes us, in regard to those mysteries of revealed religion which we cannot comprehend. We had much better suspect the inadequateness of our shallow reason, than disbelieve plain revelation, because we cannot see its consistency. Were all hearers of the gospel as modest as this, they would not censure and ridicule preachers,

as they frequently do, for exhorting the unregenerate to duties, which they have just before told them are not in their power: since in both the one and the other they have the warrant of the express word of God, and do no more than our Saviour and his apostles plainly did.

It is, however, a great unhappiness, not to be able to instruct them that oppose themselves to the Bible itself, as well as to the preachers of it, on so important a point as this. It is a great unhappiness, when we would convince men of sin because they believe not, or because they do not repent, to be obliged to tell them, that though our faith rests satisfied they are to blame for not repenting and not believing, yet we cannot see why or wherefore. It would certainly be much better, in these practical matters, and matters respecting which, self-condemnation is so essentially necessary in order to the salvation of sinners, if we could, by manifestation of the truth, commend the plain law and gospel to every man's *conscience*. And why we cannot, I must confess myself unable to conceive. My faith rests satisfied, that this Gordian-knot in revealed religion is fairly untied, by the simple distinction of natural and moral inability. By pointing out the plain difference between being unable to do good works, through the want of rational or animal powers; and merely through the want of a willing mind, or of an honest and good heart. And by making it evident that the latter, is the only inability, in even the unregenerate, to do the whole duty which God requires of man.

But the learned author last quoted thinks, "this does not touch the core of the matter." And he tells us of *three* kinds of inability in man with respect to supposed actions: *natural;* consisting in the want of rational powers or bodily strength: *moral*, consisting in a present unwillingness, when one is neither destitute of natural capacity, nor of an habitual inclination; and may be made willing by

moral suasion. The other is called, *Ethico-physical;* consisting in such a permanent total want of a disposition, that one cannot be made willing without having a new principle of action created in him. The first, all are agreed is a full excuse for not doing: the second, this author agrees, is no excuse; but why the last, (which is the inability of the unregenerate, respecting spiritual duties,) does not render men excusable, he cannot see. But why it should be any better an excuse to be totally wicked, than only partially so, I am as unable to conceive. The man who has only a present unwillingness, which moral suasion might remove, can no more be willing to do a good action until a proper motive is set before him, than an unregenerate sinner can before a new heart is given him. And why, between that unwillingness to do well which arises only from not seeing any good reason, in a particular case; and that which is owing to the total want of every good principle, there should be thought such a mighty difference in favor of the latter sinner, appears to me not less difficult to solve or unravel, than any Gordian-knot in revealed religion.

Were men destitute of understanding to know what is right; or destitute of power to choose, according to their own disposition; or destitute of members to act, according to their own choice; they would so far not be proper subjects of commands, and no blame could lie upon them for not obeying. But no such powers of moral agency, are the things wanting in natural men. They have hands and heads sufficiently good; and a sufficient power to will, whatever is agreeable to them. All they want is a good heart. Their inability is therefore their sin, and not their excuse. If any one doth not do well, when all that hinders him is not being well disposed, sin lieth at his own door. The want of a good disposition is in itself sinful. It is the essence, the root, the fountain of all sin. While a man's

disposition is perfectly good, however ignorant he may be, or whatever mistakes he may commit, it is impossible he should be blameworthy. Whenever a man's disposition is not good, however invincibly indisposed he may be to alter it, it is impossible he should not be to blame. Nor is a man the less sinful, the more depraved his heart is; and the more impracticable it is, for that reason, to persuade him to any thing that is good. On the contrary, every degree of this depravity is sin; and being thus totally depraved—destitute of every principle of goodness, is to be perfectly wicked.

These are plain, self-evident propositions. Propositions acknowledged by all mankind, except when in the dust of this dispute; or except when they are engaged to get away from the light, which would condemn them. Then they will suppose that *sin*, is not at all sinful; and that the more a man has of it, the less he is to blame. Then they will assert that moral depraivity, in a depraved creature, is no moral evil. Then they can find no blameable sin, in any man but Adam; nor in him, any longer than he was perfect in holiness. Then they will distinguish, with such refinement of metaphysical subtilty, as to make out, that though a man may be inexcusable for a little accidental unwillingness to do good, when he might easily be persuaded to do it; yet when one has once such a very depraved heart, that no arguments—no motives—no entreaties, can persuade him to a single good action, he ceases to have any wickedness, and has a sufficient excuse for the neglect of all duty. Such is the turning of things upside down, among fallen men. "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart;" is a description of mankind, applicable more extensively than to the heathen Gentiles.

A brief application will end the present discourse, both because it has been very long, and because the useful inferences naturaly arising from this subject, are much the same as from many others.

1. Let those who have been brought out of marvellous darkness, into the glorious light of the law and gospel; and recovered from their native depravity, to righteousness and true holiness, be hence led to consider the wonderful things which God hath done for them, and to adore the riches of his sovereign grace. You have certainly nothing of your own works, nor superior wisdom, to boast of, as what made you to differ, from those who are yet in the dark regions of spiritual death. It must be wholly ascribed to God, who is rich in mercy; to his great love wherewith he loved you, when dead in sin; and to the exceeding greatness of his power, according to the working of his mighty power in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. In such a world as this—so full of erroneous reasonings and strong delusions; and with such minds as all have by nature —so exceedingly liable to be blinded by the deceitfulness of sin, it must be a great thing for any one to be made to know the *plague* of his own heart, in the light of legal, genuine conviction: but a greater thing still, to have the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, caused to shine in one's heart, by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Remember the grateful acknowledgment of the Saviour of such miserable sinners; Matt. xi. 25, 26, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight."

2. Let those who entertain a hope of having been converted, be hence cautioned not hastily to conclude, with confident assurance, that they have really been

born again. Great changes may be made in the minds of persons, and possibly lasting changes in their lives; while yet, at heart, they are not new creatures. To know that a principle radically new, essentially distinct from self-love has been created in the soul—a principle of disinterested, universal goodness, is a difficult thing, and must ordinarily require close attention for a considerable time.

3. Let none entertain this hope at all, if they still live in any way of known transgression, or in the careless neglect of any religious or social duty. "Many walk," says the apostle to the Philippians, "of whom I have told you before, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." All who are in Christ, have been created unto good works, which God hath eternally ordained that they should walk in them. Let those then, who hope they have believed in God and Christ, remember that they must be careful to maintain good works; and, by patient continuance in well doing, must seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, as ever they would expect to obtain eternal life.

SERMON XVII.

ON REPENTANCE, CONVERSION, AND PARDON.

ACTS III. 19.

Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

WE have in these words, the sum and substance of all the divine calls and counsels given to sinners, in the Old Testament and the New;. and one of the principal motives to a compliance with such merciful counsels and calls. They are the words of the apostle Peter to those Jews who had been concerned in the crucifixion of our Saviour. The occasion of this exhortation to them, of which my text is a part, was the astonishment excited by the miraculous cure of one who had been a cripple from his birth. See the preceding context from verse first.

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple, who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms.

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I unto thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ancle-bones received strength. And he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One, and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him, hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. *Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*"

In discoursing upon this text, it is proposed to explain;

I. What it is to repent:

II. What it is to be converted:

III. How the sins of men may and will be blotted out, in consequence of their repenting and being converted: and,

IV. What is the duty of sinners, respecting their repentance and conversion.

I. I shall consider what it is to repent; or what is implied in true repentance.

This I shall endeavor to explain, by taking into consideration the object of it; the exercises of heart implied in it; and the principle from which these exercises proceed. As to the object of true repentance, or the thing repented of;

1. This is *sin.* Persons may repent of their conduct when it has not been sinful; or when it is not considered by them in that light. A man may repent of a generous action—an instance of kindness toward his neighbor, when it meets with an ungrateful reception, or an unsuitable return. Thus David seems to have repented of his kindness to Nabal, when he said, "Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missing of all that pertained to him; and he hath requited me evil for good." Or, one may repent of an undertaking or piece of labor, when it appears not likely to answer the end proposed. Thus, speaking after the manner of men, God is said to have repented that he had made man upon the earth. Men often repent of what they have been

doing, merely because it has proved unsuccessful; or because the profit has not been equal to the labor and expense. But the repentance of a sinner, spoken of in scripture as connected with salvation, always means repentance of sin.

2. It is to be observed that in true repentance, sin is repented of on account of its sinfulness. A man may repent of that which he sees and knows to be wrong; while yet he repents merely because of the imprudence of it, and not because of its iniquity. His regret and remorse may be only on account of the hurt he may have done himself, and not at all on account of the moral evil of his conduct. But in true repentance sin is repented of as sin.

3. It is necessary that the evil of sin should be seen, and that it should be repented of, particularly as it is against God. An action may be wrong, and may be seen to be so, and be repented of as such, in other respects besides this, of its being a violation of the divine law, and a disregard of the divine authority. Persons may repent of having treated their neighbors and friends injuriously, when a sense of the evil they have done extends no further; and they have no apprehension of having dishonored or offended their Creator. If the Most High should say to them, as he said to his people of old, "Ye have robbed me;" they would readily reply, as that people did, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" They do not imagine that they have done God any injury, or ever meant to do him any. But the great evil of all the unrighteousness, as well as ungodliness of men, consists in the disrespect shown to the supreme Governor of the world, and the reproach cast upon his great and holy name. And a conviction of this, is what principally affects the heart of a true penitent, and fills it with bitter remorse. "Against *thee*, thee ONLY have I sinned;" was the confession of David

in his penitential Psalm. Nor is any repentance genuine and saving, but what implies this apprehension and sense of the great evil of sin. Hence the apostle Paul describes that repentance which he testified and urged wherever he preached, as being repentance toward God.

4. It ought further to be observed, respecting the object of repentance, that it is not some one sin only, but all sin. I mean all one's own sins. Not that whenever a sinner truly repents, he repents of every sinful act, and omission, which he has ever been guilty of in the whole course of his life, particularly considered. This is impossible. Not half of these is any one able to recollect. But what I mean is, that a true penitent repents of all his sins in general; and of every instance of iniquity in particular, as far as he can remember it, and is conscious of its being such. If in any one thing a person remembers to have done wrong, and does not repent of it, this is a certain evidence that no part of his repentance is genuine. It is the doctrine of the apostle James, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all:" because the same divine authority that forbids one sin, equally forbids another also. And for the same reason it holds true, that if a man should seem to repent of all his known sins but one, while of that he hath no repentance, he doth not truly repent of any.

5. In explaining the object of repentance, it ought to be particularly observed, that original sin must be repented of, as well as actual sins.

By original sin, I do not mean the act of Adam in eating the forbidden fruit; but the sinfulness of our nature, which we brought into the world with us. A man, though he may feel humiliation and shame on account of the wicked conduct of another, who is nearly related to him, or from whom he proceeded;

yet it seems naturally impossible that one should have all the feelings, which are implied in the proper idea of repentance, on account of any besides his own personal sins. But I see no difficulty in supposing that a person may as truly repent of heart-sins, as sins of life; and of a depraved nature, as well as of evil thoughts, volitions, and desires. And that David's repentance was thus deep, we are plainly led to believe by his confession, Psal. li. 5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." It is also evident that Solomon considered a conviction and sense of depravity of nature, as being essential to that repentance, without which a sinner can have no reasonable hope of pardoning mercy. This appears evident from his prayer at the dedication of the temple, recorded in the eighth chapter of the first book of Kings. "What supplication," says he, "shall be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, who shall know every man *the plague of his own heart*, and shall spread forth his hands toward this house; then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive." And indeed, it seems plainly impossible that a person should have that self-abasement and self-condemnation which true repentance implies, merely from seeing the evil of particular actions, or transient exercises, without having a sense of that depravity of his nature, which alone can constitute a permanently wicked character.

Having considered what sinners must repent of, we will next make some inquiry concerning those exercises and affections of heart, which are implied in true repentance. These are, sorrow, shame, self-condemnation, hatred of sin, and sincere purposes to forsake it, and desires to be delivered from it.

1. True repentance implies grief and sorrow for one's sins. David says, Psal. xxxviii. 3—6, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger,

neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.—I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." And ver. 18, "I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin."

2. Shame, is essential to true repentance. Psal. xliv. 15, "My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me." Jer. xxxi. 19, "Surely after that I was turned, I repented, and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." And chap. iii. 25, "We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God."

3. Self-condemnation is implied in true repentance. See Lev. xxvi. 41, "If then their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity; then will I remember my covenant," &c. See also 1 Cor. xi. 31, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." Thus the penitent thief upon the cross condemned himself, saying to his fellow, who scoffed at Christ, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? and we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our evil deeds." Every sinner who truly repents, is brought to see the justice of God in condemning him, and heartily to approve of the sentence of condemnation passed upon him.

4. True repentance implies hatred of sin, and turning from it in heart, with a sincere desire and fixed purpose to keep the divine law for the time to come. This seems to be what the apostle means by it, when he says, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of." He is

there telling the Corinthians what he had heard of the good effects his former epistle had had upon them. In the following verse he says, "For behold, this self same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal." In vain is that repentance which does not imply a sincere desire and fixed purpose of amendment; or which is not followed with a lasting reformation.

As to the motives and principles of true repentance, I observe,

1. That it doth not proceed merely from a slavish fear of punishment. A disobedient servant will profess to be sorry for his faults, and will readily promise to do better, when under the rod, or when threatened with severe correction: and in like manner a sinner, when destruction from God is a terror to him, will confess and promise, and feel a kind of sorrow for what he has done or neglected to do, and may have some serious thoughts of doing better. This hath been commonly called *legal* repentance, because it is owing altogether to the terror of the divine law, and the fearful apprehension of the wrath to come thence arising.

2. It ought to be observed, that true repentance doth not originate from mercenary hopes of heaven; or from a belief of God's electing love and pardoning grace. Something like repentance, in all the forementioned parts and exercises of it, may arise entirely from a persuasion that one is an object of God's peculiar favor, and a subject of his distinguishing mercy. There is hardly any one so totally destitute of natural gratitude, as not to feel some grief and sorrow, shame and self-condemnation, for atrocious offences committed against a kind friend and great benefactor, when a remembrance of his

generous benefits is fresh in mind. Thus, when David had spared the life of Saul, having had a fair opportunity to have slain him while he and all his life-guard were soundly sleeping in the cave; Saul, on being certified of it, said, "I have sinned: return, my son David; for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thy sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." So, an unregenerate sinner will naturally feel a kind of repentance toward God, when he is made to entertain a strong belief of his special love and mercy towards him. There is no need of a new heart in order to this; nor will another spirit be produced in the carnal mind, by any remorse arising from such interested motives.

Indeed, a sense of God's goodness toward them, increases godly sorrow in true penitents, and makes them appear more vile in their own eyes. This is agreeable to what is said in Ezek. xvi. 63, "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God." An apprehension of pardoning mercy is not necessary, however, in order to the first feelings of true repentance. Nor is that a repentance unto salvation, which is the fruit of nothing more than a belief that one's sins already are, or ever will be forgiven. But,

3. True repentance arises from disinterested love to God: a foundation for which is laid in the soul by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. When the stony heart is taken out of one's flesh, and a heart of flesh is given, he will repent, not merely as Ahab did at the threatening of Elijah; nor merely as Saul repented because of the kindness of David: he will feel an ultimate concern for the honor of God, and an ingenuous sorrow and grief for all that he has done to his offence and displeasure; whether he believes

that God is pacified toward him or not. When one is created after God in righteousness and true holiness, he will hate sin, and resolve to forsake the ways of it, from that principle, and not merely from a principle of self-love.

II. We now proceed to consider what it is to be converted.

Conversion is often spoken of in such a general sense as to comprehend repentance. Most commonly, by being converted is meant, the whole change in a sinner when he is turned from sin to holiness in heart and life: and the word repentance is also sometimes to be understood in the same extensive signification. But when both these expressions are used together, in the manner which the apostle uses them in our text, it seems necessary to limit the meaning of both of them, so far as that they may communicate ideas somewhat different and distinct.

By being converted, I suppose Peter here means the same, as being persuaded to embrace the gospel. He was addressing himself to some of those who had been concerned in the crucifixion of Christ: who, by their clamorous importunity had constrained the Roman governor, contrary to his own opinion and desire, to pass the sentence of death upon Jesus; and who, when Pilate washed his hands before them, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person, see ye to it;" answered boldly, "His blood be on us, and on our children." The apostle, therefore, taking advantage of the consternation excited in these men by a notable miracle wrought in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, counsels them to repent of this, and all their other sins, and to be *converted.* That is, to give up their prejudices against Christ, and become his disciples: to receive him as their promised Messiah, and return to the Holy One of Israel, through him looking for pardon and salvation on ac-

count of his atonement and righteousness alone. And a conversion essentially similar to this, is necessary in the case of every sinner, in order to forgiveness and justification before God. Here then, more particularly,

1. When persons are converted, they return to God, as their rightful supreme Lord.

The carnal mind of man, as born of the flesh, we are told, "is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." But in conversion, implying regeneration, the minds of persons are altered in this respect. They become friendly to God—to his sovereignty, law, and government: are made willing to be under his command, and at the disposal of his Providence in all things; to be dependant upon his free grace, and to give unto him the glory due to his great and holy name. Col. i. 21, "And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled."

2. When persons are converted, they return to God as their chief good: the centre and source of all their happiness.

The Holy One of Israel says, Jer. ii. 13, "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." And that such is the folly of sinners generally, our Saviour has strikingly represented in his parable of the prodigal; Luke xv. 11—16, "A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there

arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him." This is a fit illustration of the conduct and condition, not only of the Gentile world, but of every unregenerate sinner. Man is naturally disposed to set up a divided and separate interest of his own, as his ultimate object of pursuit; and to seek happiness independently of God, and at a distance from him.

Now, the conversion of a sinner, is his being brought to see that in the service and enjoyment of God, is the only real freedom, and soul-satisfying happiness; and his returning to him, with these views and expectations. Thus, when the prodigal came to himself, he said; "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise, and go to my father."

3. When persons are converted, they receive Christ as their Saviour, and put their trust in him as an all-sufficient Mediator between God and them. In John xiv. 6, we are told Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the way, and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." And it is spoken of as the sum of the gospel report, 2 Cor. v. 19, "To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." It is also said of Christ, Heb. vii. 25, "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." There is no such thing as a sinner's finding rest for his soul, on good grounds, but by coming to Christ, and through him to the Father. If we would not have our hearts troubled, respecting pardon and peace, it is not enough to believe in God; we must believe also in

Christ. A saving conversion implies the latter, as well as the former.

4. It ought ever to be remembered, that when persons are converted, the change of heart, will be followed by a lasting change of life, from sin to holiness.

"I thought on my ways," says David, appealing to God, "and turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments." It is said, Isa. lv. 7, "Let the wicked forsake his *way*, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him." And Ezek. xxxiii. 11, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil *ways*; for why will ye die?"

As a mere external reformation, without a change of heart, is not that conversion which will save men; so no supposed change of heart, which is not productive of a religious and virtuous course of life, is a true conversion.

III. I am next to speak of the manner in which the sins of sincere penitents and true converts, are or will be *blotted out*.

The blotting out of sins, is a figurative mode of expression; alluding to the erasement or crossing of book accounts when they are balanced. It supposes, speaking after the manner of men, that God keeps a book, in which he sets down all the sins of every person; and that when any one repents, and turns from the way of transgressors, this book account against him is crossed, so that it can never more be read. And it is certain that God keeps as exact a remembrance of the actions of men as if they were all literally written down in a book: but we are not to suppose that the iniquities of persons, when they repent, are so blotted out that God cannot read them,

or no longer has them in remembrance. This is impossible. An omniscient being must be supposed to know all things past, as perfectly as the present. All that can be meant by God's blotting out sins, is his granting a gracious pardon of them. He may forgive, but never can forget, what has been amiss in us. We often read of his pardoning sins; by which we are to understand, his remitting the punishment of them, in whole or in part: and this, as far as he does it, is as effectual a security from his wrath on account of them, as if they were actually blotted out of his remembrance. Those iniquities of men which God hath fully forgiven, will never be brought into judgment against them, as matter of condemnation, any more than if they were entirely forgotten; or than if they had never been. Hence he says, Isa. xliv. 22, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." And Jer. l. 20, "In those days, and in that time, the iniquity of Jacob shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." And hence it is said, Micah, vii. 18, 19, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities: and thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." When sins are entirely forgiven of God, it is, with respect to their ever rising up to the hurt of the sinner, as if they were buried in everlasting oblivion.

Let us now consider *when*, the sins of those who repent and are converted, will be thus blotted out. In some places the pardon of men is promised them, immediately on their repentance and conversion. Respecting the seed of Jacob as a nation, God says, 2 Chron. vii. 14, "If my people, which is called by

my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." The pardon of individuals is also sometimes spoken of as what had already been granted. See Matt. ix. 2, "Son be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." Luke vii. 47, "Her sins which are many are forgiven." And Eph. iv. 32, "Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." It is likewise said, "He that believeth, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation." And, "There is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

By a sinful nation's being forgiven, on repentance and a reformation, we are to understand the remission of certain public judgments, with which it had been threatened. By the forgiveness of particular sinners, immediately on their conversion, by repentance and faith in Christ, is to be understood, their being delivered from the wrath to come, or secured, by the promises of the gospel, from eternal punishment. Not that they are so fully forgiven, but that they may be punished in the life which now is, both for their past and their future sins. Job says to God, "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." And this is the case, undoubtedly, with many good men. When David was brought to repentance, and said, "I have sinned against the Lord;" Nathan said unto him, "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." Which punishment, and the others before denounced, were inflicted upon him with unabated severity, notwithstanding his sin was put away, as to the penalty which was its capital and full desert.

Hezekiah likewise, because his heart was lifted up, and he rendered not again according to the benefits done him, was sorely visited and terribly threatened, though he had long been eminently pious. And the apostle Paul, when reproving the Corinthians for their scandalous attendance on the Lord's supper, says to them; "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

True penitents and believers are not under the curse of the law, but under a covenant of grace: a covenant according to which they are out of danger of the condemnation of the wicked, and their final salvation is secured. Nevertheless, they are not so forgiven as that their transgressions may not be yet visited with the rod, in this world, and their iniquity with stripes.

But in our text it is said, "Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, *when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*" What are we to understand by those times?

Some understand by them, the times of the more full pouring out of the Divine Spirit under the gospel dispensation: and some, the times of wrath and destruction which would soon come upon Jerusalem, and upon the persecuting Jews in general; which would be times of a short relief and rofreshing to the persecuted christians.

But, though these might, with some propriety, be spoken of as refreshing times to the suffering disciples of Christ, it appears from what follows, that the apostle had an ultimate reference to a more distant day; even the day of final retribution. "When the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, who

before was preached unto you, whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution," (or fulfilment) " of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his prophets, since the world began."

At the day of judgment, the sins of those who shall then appear to have truly repented, and been converted to the obedience of the gospel, will be blotted out, more fully than they ever are in this world. All such will then be openly acquitted from the whole curse of the law; and will have an everlasting deliverance from all the penal and unhappy consequences of original and actual sin.

It was proposed, in the last place, to consider, what is the duty of sinners, relative to their repentance and conversion; since these are made matters of exhortation and command to them. And here,

1. We are to understand, undoubtedly, that it is the duty of all to whom the overtures of salvation are made, immediately to repent of their sins, and turn from them to God, in the way that he offers pardoning mercy.

Many are ready to argue that since repentance and faith are the gifts of God, and not in the power of sinners so long as they are in a state of unregeneracy; the only duty at pesent incumbent on them respecting these matters, is to be in the use of those outward means, whereby saving grace is ordinarily communicated to the souls of men. That such exercises of heart as imply real holiness, cannot reasonably be required of them while unrenewed. But, that the inspired preachers of christianity thought otherwise, is very obvious. Their first exhortation to sinners was, " Repent, and believe the gospel." " Repent, and be converted." And if any at all delayed repenting sincerely, and becoming true christians, those preachers evidently considered them as being alto-

gether criminal and without excuse. Our Saviour himself severely upbraided those who had heard his doctrines and seen his miracles, because they repented not: plainly telling them that it would be more tolerable in the day of judgment, for Tyre and Sidon, and even for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for them.

As to the common objection, that to command or exhort men to repent with godly sorrow, and believe to the saving of the soul, while they are unregenerate, is unreasonable; and that to condemn them for not doing so is unjust, because a compliance with such requisitions is not in their power: to this the answer is, that all the reason they cannot do these things, is their not being so disposed; or their not having an honest and good heart: and that what men could do if they would, or if it were not for the wickedness of their hearts, they may reasonably be required to do, and may justly be condemned for not doing. This was the way which our Saviour took, to stop the mouths of such objectors. He said to the unbelieving Jews, "Ye *will not* come unto me that ye might have life." And to the city of Jerusalem, when abandoned to destruction; "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye *would not*." And again; "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

But it may be said, To call upon sinners to repent and believe, or to be converted, when it is impossible they should do these things, let this impossibility be owing to what it will, is in vain, and can do no good. Is it not better to tell the unconverted of things which they *can* do; and to give them directions and exhortations with which they may possibly be persuaded to comply?

To this it is answered: Though no preaching will be of any avail for the conversion of sinners, without the special grace of God; yet, under that preaching which has a tendency to convince them of their duty and their sin, we have more reason to expect this divine grace, than under that which rather tends to strengthen their self-deception, and to shut out more entirely the light of genuine conviction. To urge on the unregenerate only the externals of religion, is the direct way to make them think that all their duty consists in the performance of these: and, consequently, to build them up upon the rotten foundation of self-righteousness and dead works. On the contrary, the method taken by our Saviour and his apostles, of urging sincere repentance and saving faith, as the immediate duty of unbelieving and impenitent sinners; and insisting upon their utter inexcusableness in the neglect of these, has a natural tendency to cast down self-righteous imaginations, and to make men sensible of the necessity of renewing grace, and of an interest in the righteousness of Christ. Yet,

2. It is nevertheless the duty of the unconverted to be in the diligent use of the outward and ordinary means of conversion; and to this they should be exhorted.

As, on the one hand, some imagine that nothing more than external duties can reasonably be urged upon the unregenerate; so, on the contrary, others seem to suppose that no directions are to be given them, except to be perfect, or to repent and believe the gospel. But this last opinion, as well as the first, appears to me unfounded, either in reason or scripture. If it be the duty of sinners to repent, it is their duty to endeavor to know what they have to repent of. If it be their duty to believe the gospel, it must be their duty to be in the use of proper means to understand the import of the gospel, and

the evidences of its truth. Accordingly, in the Old Testament, impenitent sinners are exhorted to *consider their ways:* and in the New, unbelievers are directed to *search the scriptures.*

We will now conclude with some application of our subject.

1. From the explanation now given of repentance and conversion, false converts may be undeceived; and all should be cautioned not to lay hold on a hope, upon slender and insufficient evidence.

There are many ways in which persons may vainly flatter themselves that they have experienced a saving change. Some may rest in a mere external reformation. They have forsaken former gross ways of sin, and are become constant in those religious duties which they once carelessly neglected; and this they may take to be conversion. Others have been under fearful apprehensions of devouring fire and everlasting burnings; but, in the midst of their greatest terrors, perhaps some comfortable text of scripture came suddenly into their mind, such as, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee;" or, "Fear not,—it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;" or by some other means a confident persuasion was given them of God's electing love and pardoning mercy, which filled them with joy and comfort; and, of course, with repentance, and purposes of new obedience; but all from the old native principle of self-love. In such ways, thousands and ten thousands have probably been deceived, and have gone down to the grave with a lie in their right hand.

Think not that you have experienced repentance unto salvation, unless you have had that sorrow for sin and hatred of it, which did not begin with loving God because of an apprehension of his being pacified toward you; or of your being chosen of him as a

vessel of mercy, and an heir of glory. Think not that you are converted, unless you have had a change of heart, as well as of life. Unless you have cordially turned to God as your rightful Lord; being reconciled to his law and government, and to the absolute sovereignty of his Providence and grace. Unless you love God for what he is in himself, and have returned to him as your chief good; being able truly to say to him with the psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and none upon earth do I desire besides thee." Nor unless you have trusted in Christ, as the only way to the Father; relying upon him alone, as the meritorious ground of hope toward God. Nor unless you live by faith on the Son of God, have learnt of him, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

2. It may be seen from our subject, that the inducement set before sinners in the gospel, to repent and be converted, is infinitely weighty and powerful. How great, how necessary, how infinitely important a thing must it be, to have your sins so blotted out, that they will not be brought in against you, to your everlasting condemnation, when the books shall be opened in the day of judgment!

3. The greatest of sinners may hence see that there is hope in their case. The crucifiers of their Saviour were taught to entertain a hope that their sins might be blotted out; and thousands of them were pricked in their heart, converted and saved. Christ is exalted to give repentance, and remission of sins. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

SERMON XVIII.

ON SAVING FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN VI. 29.

This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

SOME would have ministers preach only on plain practical subjects, and not trouble their unlearned hearers with controverted points of doctrine. And undoubtedly it is true, that things which "come home to men's business and bosoms," are more suitable for the pulpit, than matters of mere speculation. But practical subjects, are not all of equal importance. People should be instructed in every duty required of them in God's perfect law; but it most of all concerns them to be rightly informed respecting that duty which is made absolutely necessary to their salvation, in the gospel of his grace. "What must I do to be saved?" is the all-important question for a sinner. And to this question, the all-comprehensive answer is given, by our great Teacher, in the words now to be insisted on.

The preceding part of the chapter contains an account of Christ's feeding about five thousand men, with only five loaves of bread and two small fishes. By this miracle, these men were impressed with a

strong persuasion of his being that great temporal deliverer of the Jews, of whom they were then in impatient expectation; probably, as it convinced them of his power easily to support numerous armies, and to conquer the world. Accordingly, they were about to take him, in a violent and tumultuous manner, and proclaim him their king. Which, when Jesus perceived, he withdrew secretly from them to a mountain himself alone: and at night, his disciples having attempted to cross the sea of Galilee, and being in imminent danger by reason of a tempestuous wind, he went to them walking on the waves; and having stilled the storm, they soon landed together on the opposite shore. The next day, when the multitude, who saw the disciples depart without him, and knew of no vessel in which he could have followed them, had searched long for him on the other side, they took shipping and crossed likewise to Capernaum: where, unexpectedly finding him with his disciples, they said unto him, "Rabbi, when camest thou hither?" But instead of gratifying their curiosity in regard to the time or manner of his coming, our Saviour rather reproved them for their unworthy and carnal motives, in pursuing him with so much anxiety. "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." Hereupon, willing perhaps to justify themselves, they said unto him, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" To which question, with whatever views it might be asked, our Lord gave a serious and direct reply. "Jesus answered and said unto them, *This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*"

By him whom God hath sent, it is plain, our Saviour means himself. The only things which need explanation in the words, are therefore these two;

What is implied in believing truly on Jesus Christ. And,

How we are to understand that this is the work of God.

These, accordingly, will be the heads of the ensuing discourse.

I. What it is truly to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, I shall endeavor particularly to explain.

There are several things necessary to be believed concerning Christ; and there is a peculiar manner of believing these things, which is essential to saving faith. With respect to the former—the things to be believed concerning our Saviour;

1. It is necessary that we should have a right belief respecting his glorious and wonderful person. More particularly, that he is truly a Divine person, must be believed. The proper Divinity of Christ, is many ways, very expressly taught in the holy scriptures. He is often spoken of as the Son of God, in a manner peculiar to himself, and inapplicable to any created being. He is called God's *only begotten* Son. He is said to be the *brightness* of the Father's glory; and the *express image* of his person. Yea, we are told that "He was in the beginning with God, and was God." That "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the God-head." That "He is over all, God blessed for ever more." The incommunicable perfections, and the most peculiar works of God, are also ascribed to him, and claimed by him. He is acknowledged to be omniscient by the apostle Peter; John xxi. 17, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." He speaks of himself as omnipresent, Matt. xviii. 20, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And Matt. xxviii. 19, 20, "Go ye and teach all nations, bap-

tizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." He is spoken of as being eternal and immutable; Heb. vii. 3, "Having neither beginning of days, nor end of life." And chap. xiii. 8, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." He says, "What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son;" John v. 19. And ver. 21, 22, 23, "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." And it is said, Col. i. 16, 17, "By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in the earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones, or dominions or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." And as the peculiar perfections and works of God are ascribed to Christ, so that adoration which is due to God alone, is commanded to be rendered to him; Heb. i. 6, "When he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him."

Thus evident is it, that if we have a true belief concerning Christ, according to the scriptures, we must believe him truly a Divine person; the second person in the eternal Trinity.

Some are so liberal, that they allow us to have as low, or as high an opinion as we please of the Saviour of the world, without at all endangering our salvation. An English divine, a volume of whose sermons has lately passed through several American editions, says, "Give me but the fact that Christ is the *resurrection* and the *life*, and explain it how you will. Give me but this single truth, that ETERNAL

LIFE *is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour*, and I shall be perfectly easy with respect to the contrary opinions which are entertained about the dignity of Christ; about his nature, person and offices.—Call him, if you please, simply a *man*, endowed with extraordinary powers; or call him a super-angelic being, who appeared in human nature for accomplishing our salvation; or say, (if you can admit a thought so shockingly absurd) that it was the second of three co-equal persons in the God-head, forming one person, with a human soul, that came down from heaven, and suffered and died upon the cross.—I shall think such differences of little moment, provided the fact be allowed, that Christ did rise from the dead, and will raise us from the dead; and that all righteous penitents will, through God's grace in him, be accepted and made happy for ever."*

But I do not find that this article of our faith is represented in the New-Testament, as a matter of so much indifference. Paul counted all things but loss for the true knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. Peter foretels that there shall be false teachers among christians, "who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." And John says, in his first epistle, "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." And near the conclusion of his gospel he says, "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." "What think ye of Christ?" was his own question to the Pharisees. And to his disciples he said, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am? On their an-

* Dr. Price.

swering, Some say that thou art John the baptist; some say Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets;" he puts the question to themselves, "But whom say ye that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Borjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, Thou art Peter; and upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The name, Peter, signifies a rock or stone: but it cannot be supposed, consistently with reason, or scripture, that the person of Peter was the rock intended. He, surely, could not bear the weight of the whole church of Christ in all ages, and be able to defend it against all the powers of darkness from the gates of hell. Accordingly, a more firm rock than the apostle Peter, or his infallible successor, is often spoken of as the basis of the christian church, and of the eternal hopes of fallen men. See Isa. xxviii. 16, "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious coner stone, a sure foundation." See also the words of Peter himself before the Jewish council, Acts iv. 10, 11, 12, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." And Eph. ii. 19, 20, "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." When, therefore, Christ says, "Upon this

rock will I build my church," he must be understood to mean, upon this article of faith which Peter had then confessed, and not upon Peter himself.

Nor can it reasonably be supposed that our Saviour would have said things, as he often did, which were generally and naturally understood to be making himself equal with God, had he not considered the belief of his being really so, very necessary to be inculcated. Would he of whom the Father testified, "My servant shall deal *prudently*," have prejudiced so many of his hearers, and prevented their conversion, by insisting upon, or once insinuating, what he well knew they accounted blasphemy, unless he had viewed it as a point of fundamental importance? Some preachers may be fond of throwing out strange things, which, if true, are of little or no consequence; but this certainly was not the manner of the Author and Finisher of our faith. From his discourses relative to this doctrine, therefore, we are led to conclude, not only that it is a real truth, but a truth very essential to be known and believed in order to the salvation of men.

But it is equally a plain doctrine of the gospel, and equally an essential article of our faith, that Christ was a real and proper man. 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22, "For since by man came death, by *man* came also the resurrection of the dead. For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." And ver. 47, "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second *man* is the Lord from heaven." Phil. ii. 6, 7, 8, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found *in fashion as a man*, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." 1 Tim. ii. 5, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus." And Heb. ii. 16, 17, "For verily

he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore, it behoved him *in all things to be made like unto his brethren.*"

Some, who would not be thought Arians, and who acknowledge the proper Divinity of our Saviour, believe, nevertheless, that be existed, as a creature, long before his incarnation: that he was the first of all created beings, and far superior to the highest angels. But how they can reconcile this idea of him, with a belief of his proper *humanity*, I do not readily see. Surely, one who has nothing more of manhood, than a mere animal body, is not a man, in all things like his brethren: and it is not supposed, I presume, that Christ had a human soul, besides his Divine, and super-angelic natures. In that case, there must have been three distinct natures, in one person.

That Christ was, and continues to be, a perfect man, however, is the evident doctrine of the New-Testament. And the belief of this, as well as of his being truly God, is undoubtedly necessary in order to our trusting in him as a suitable, or capable Redeemer of the souls of men.

2. To believe truly on him whom God hath sent, we must have a right understanding and belief respecting the design of his mission.

What that was he himself hath declared in general, John iii. 17, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." And with what salvation, we are particularly informed in many other places. See Matt. i. 21—"He shall save his people *from their sins.*" 1 Thes. i. 10, "Even Jesus, which delivered us from *the wrath to come.*" And 2 Tim. ii. 10, "That they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with *eternal glory.*"

The five thousand whom our Saviour miraculously fed, as related in the context, had different ideas of this matter. They considered him only as a temporal deliverer: and therefore, though they said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world," yet they were far from being true believers in him.

To have saving faith in Christ, we must believe that he was sent to obtain for lost men, a spiritual and an eternal salvation: deliverance from sin and hell, and the enjoyment of immortal happiness in the kingdom of heaven.

3. It is necessary that we should have a right belief concerning the way and manner, in which Christ hath procured this salvation for us.

He hath done this, we are told, by obeying and dying in our nature and stead. It is written, "By the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous." It is written, "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." It is written, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." It is written, "Now once, in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

Here again, "The liberal man deviseth liberal things;" and must do so to be consistent. The learned divine before quoted, supposes it equally immaterial what we believe concerning the way of our salvation, as concerning the person of our Saviour. "Say," says he, "that Christ saves us merely by being a messenger from God to reveal to us eternal life, and to confer it upon us; or say, on the contrary, that he not only *reveals* to us eternal life, and confers it upon us, but has *obtained* it for us by offering himself a propitiatory sacrifice on the cross, and making satisfaction to the justice of the Deity

for our sins:—Is it not obvious, with respect to these differences, that they affect not the doctrine itself of our salvation by Christ; and that however they are determined, the foundation of our hopes remains the same?"

And indeed, if the glory of God were nothing to be accounted of; if the honor of Christ were a matter of no consequence, and if we might be happy without seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, as well as with, this might be obvious. If our escaping punishment, and obtaining a heaven agreeable to the native wish of our hearts, were the only things in the universe of any importance, it would be very immaterial by whom we were saved, or how. In that case we might well enough believe and preach another gospel; not much offensive to a Jew, or Mahometan, or Pagan. In that case, "even denying the Lord that bought us," would be no *damnable heresy.* The foundation of *our* hopes would still remain the same.

But God, though his name is love, is not *so* liberal. "He cannot deny himself." Those whom he would have to be saved, he would have come to the knowledge of the truth, that his name may be glorified. And *all* other beings in the universe would not be perfectly satisfied, to see the guilty cleared, and the rewards of the righteous given them, without understanding upon what grounds. The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, are things, we are told, into which the angels desire to look. We are also told, that when the Saviour of this ruined world was born, a multitude of the heavenly host sang together, "Glory to God in the highest," as well as, "on earth peace, good will towards men." But that there may be the highest glory to God, or any glory at all, in the salvation of sinners, it must be seen that his grace is not exalted to the eternal dishonor of his justice. "A just God, and a Saviour," is the united name, in which he glories: and

he would be known to all, in the former as well as in the latter of these characters. Hence it was that he set forth Christ to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood for the remission of sins. This was done, that he might be just, and be known to be so, while he justifies transgressors, on their believing in Jesus. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." But not so to unbelievers. To any one who remains in total ignorance or error concerning Christ, or concerning his atonement, he is no end of the law at all. It is said, "If righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain;" but equally in vain would be his death, in regard to the glory of God in the eyes of men, if they were to be saved without seeing the necessity, or without understanding the nature, of that satisfaction which was made to divine justice, by his painful and ignominious sufferings.

For these reasons, undoubtedly it was, that the apostles so strenuously insisted, in all their preaching, on *Christ crucified;* notwithstanding they knew it was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." On non-essential points, they fed those with milk who were unable to bear strong meat, and were very careful not to give Jew, or Greek, or the church of God, any offence; but, upon this great article of salvation by the propitiatory sacrifice of God's only begotten Son, they determined always to insist, let who would be offended.

4. I will only just observe further, that it is necessary to have a firm and full belief of the power and willingness of Christ to save, all who are willing to be saved by him, in every respect in which they need salvation.

As to the all-sufficiency of his power; see 1 Cor. i. 30, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Col. i. 19;

"For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell." And Heb. vii. 25, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."

As to his willingness to save any sinner who thus comes; see Matt. xi. 28, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And John vi. 37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

And the truth, both of Christ's being able and willing thus to save, is seen and relied upon by all true believers. 1 Tim. i. 15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." And 2 Tim. i. 12, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

These are the things concerning Christ, necessary to be believed. But it must not be forgotten that there is a *peculiar manner* of believing these things, which is essential to saving faith.

It has been confidently asserted, indeed, by one author, at least, that the faith by which we are justified, is *a simple belief of the simple truth.* He says, "Let us lay aside all questions about *how* a man believes; and let the only question be, *What* does he believe? Every one who believes the same truth which the apostles believed, has equally precious faith with them. He has unfeigned faith and shall assuredly be saved."*

But if we believe simply as the apostles did, or as their Lord taught them, I am persuaded we shall not believe this doctrine. John says of Christ, "As many as *received* him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on

* Mr. Sandeman.

his name." Paul tells us of the pious patriarchs, "These all died in faith; not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were *persuaded* of them, and *embraced* them. He also speaks of such as perished, "because they received not the *love* of the truth, that they might be saved." Peter, having spoken of coming to Christ, and being built upon him as the elect and precious corner stone in Zion, says, "unto you, therefore, which believe, he is *precious*." And James spends a whole chapter in showing that a simple belief of the truth will not save men; observing, among other things, that the devils have this faith.

Thus the apostles taught; and thus they had learned of their Divine Lord. Many are the sayings of our Saviour which evidently teach us that the *consent* of men to be saved by him, as well as their *assent* to the truth delivered by him, and revealed concerning him, is necessary in order to an interest in his salvation. He said to unbelievers, "Ye *will not come* unto me that ye *might* have life." He said, "If any man thirst, let him *come* unto me and drink." He said, "Whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple: and whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." But he hath sufficiently decided this point in our text itself, that saving faith implies activity, or something done; and is not a mere passive conviction of any truth whatever: "This is the *work* of God, that ye believe."

True believers receive the truth in *love*. They *embrace* the doctrines, and promises, and terms of the gospel with cordial complacency. They love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. They come unto him, and to God by him. They trust in him, and are made his willing people in the day of his power —willing to be taught, saved, and governed by him, as their prophet, priest and king. These exercises of heart, as well as right ideas and convictions

of every necessary truth, are evidently, according to the scriptures, of the essence of saving faith.

II. It remains to be considered, how we are to understand, that believing thus on him whom he hath sent, is the work of God.

From the question to which these words are an answer, it is obvious that our Saviour here speaks of the work which God requires *us* to do, and not of that which *he* does in us and for us. Faith is the gift of God, as a foundation for it is laid by the renewing of the Holy Ghost: nevertheless, it is the act, and the duty of man. 1 John iii. 23, "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." And John iii. 18, "He that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

But, believing in Christ, is not the only duty required of man, under the gospel. "God now commandeth all men every where to *repent*." Yea, repentance seems to be spoken of as prior to saving faith: Mark i. 15, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." Acts xx. 21, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." And as a man must repent sincerely, before he can believe to the saving of the soul; so, those who thus believe, must bring forth fruits meet for repentance. They must maintian good works, and be holy in all manner of conversation, or their faith will not save them. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation —teacheth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." And we read that God, "in the day of the revelation of his righteous judgment, will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who, by patient continuance, in well doing,

seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life." Why then should it be said of believing on him whom he hath sent, this is *the* work, and not rather *a* work of God?

I answer; Though believing in Christ is not the only duty which God requires of man, nor the only one which is made necessary to his salvation; yet, to believe with the heart on the Saviour of sinners, is required in a peculiar manner, and for singular purposes. More particularly,

1. Believing on him whom he hath sent, is *the* work of God, as this is the only thing in a sinner, by which he can attain unto justification of life. By this alone can we have admission into the covenant favor of God, or become entitled to the promises of his everlasting love. This alone determines the matter respecting a man's eternal happiness. John iii. 36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Rom. iii. 20—23, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.—But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." And ver. 27, 28, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay; but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

Thus faith stands alone, in the affair of gospel justification. By this alone we obtain remission of sins, and an unfailing title to the kingdom of heaven. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Not that there is any thing so sin-

gularly excellent in faith itself. If it entitled a sinner to justification by reason of its own merit, boasting would not be excluded by the law of faith, any more than by the law of works. All that gives faith the only place, or any preference, in this all-important matter, is its laying hold of, resting upon, and so obtaining an interest in, "*The Lord our righteousness*;" in whom there is a full sufficiency of merit for the most unworthy. We are justified by faith, in distinction from every thing else, done by us, or found in us, only because, in believing, we receive Christ, and become his disciples and subjects: and this places us in such a relation to him, that, with propriety, we can be received into the covenant favor of God wholly on his account. In families, and in kingdoms, it is a common thing for all the members to partake of the honors and advantages procured by the merit or labors of the head. And whatever makes one a member of a particular family or nation, gives him a title to the privileges and distinctions of that community. Now faith in Christ being that alone by which we become members of his body—of his household and kingdom; it is by this alone that we are entitled to the benefits of his merit and labors—of his obedience, sufferings, and intercession.

For this reason, when our Saviour was asked, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" he might well answer, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." As if he had said; You will find yourselves altogether mistaken if you think of obtaining the favor of God, and his spiritual and eternal blessings, by any good works of your own. The only thing you can do in order to this, and the only thing which he requires of you for this end, is to receive his Son, whom he hath sent to fulfil all righteousness for you, relying upon him entirely for all the merit you need, to recommend you to the divine mercy.

2. To believe in Christ is *the* work of God—the first and great thing which he insists upon, as all our works must be performed in the exercise of this faith, in order to their being acceptable in his sight, and rewardable in the world to come.

Col. iii. 17, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." 1 Pet. ii. 5, "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." And 1 Cor. iii. 11—14, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ. Now, if any man build *upon this foundation*, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day that cometh shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built *thereupon*, he shall receive a reward." *Imperfect* good works deserve a curse, because of their deficiency; and can never entitle the doer of them to a blessing, on the ground of strict law and justice. But when they are done in the name of Christ, and by one who belongs to him, their imperfections being pardoned through his atonement, as far as there is any real goodness in them, they will be graciously accepted, and gloriously recompensed at the resurrection of the just. The acceptance of our services, as well as the justification of our persons, is only through faith in Christ.

3. To believe on him whom he hath sent, may be said to be *the* work of God, because all our spiritual ability for the performance of good works, besure with that perseverance which our final salvation requires, is from union to Christ by faith. John xv. 5, "I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing."

Gal. ii. 20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." And Phil. iv. 13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Now, since the best of men are thus dependant on Christ for a life of holiness—since all spiritual strength for such a life is derived, by faith, from him; the answer is natural to those who inquired, "What shall we do *that we might* work the works of God?" "This is *the* work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

Our subject may be applied and improved to the following purposes:

1. To make us cautious not to entertain wrong ideas of saving faith. Such definitions have been given of it by many, as render their doctrine of justification by faith alone, liable to just and weighty objections. If we explain that faith by which alone men become infallibly entitled to eternal salvation, as being only a bare conviction that the gospel report is true; or to be only a confident belief that they themselves are elected and shall be saved, we thus make void the law; and likewise the great design of the gospel. Such a faith as either of these, pre-supposes no holiness of heart; and will not necessarily, or naturally, be productive of any real holiness of life. If, on the contrary, conformably to the evangelist John, we suppose that as many as *receive* Christ, become the sons of God; having been previously born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God:" if we suppose regeneration prior to saving faith, and that faith implies a cordial reception of Christ in all his mediatorial offices, with a hearty determination to be his obedient subjects; then, though "we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the

deeds of the law," good works will be effectually secured, and the law most honorably established.

2. We may hence judge what is truth, in regard to the importance of maintaining or denying, that our justification before God, is by faith alone in the righteousness of Christ.

The smooth Doctor, several times refered to in the preceding discourse, gliding over the capital points of contention among christians, and pronouncing them all of contemptible insignificance, says; "I will further instance in the disputes about justification. There are no disputes which have disturbed the christian church much more; nor are there any which can appear, to a considerate man, more unmeaning and trifling. The principal subject of these disputes has been the question, whether we are justified by faith alone, or by faith in conjunction with good works. You should consider, with respect to this question, that those who hold notions the most rigid, make justifying faith to be the seed and principle of personal holiness; and that there is no sect of christians (however extravagant their doctrines may be) which have not *some expedient* or *salvo* for maintaining the necessity of good works. If they say that personal holiness is not a *condition* of justification, they say what amounts to the same, that it is a *qualification* which must be found in all justified persons, and that without it we cannot be accepted. If they say that we are justified by faith alone, they add, that we cannot be justified by that faith which is alone (that is, by a faith not accompanied with good works) and that it is only on the virtuous believer, or the man who proves the truth of his faith by his works, that the grace of God in Christ will confer future happiness. How trifling then have been the controversies on this subject? As long as all hold that the practice of righteousness is necessary to bring us to heaven, what does it signify whether it

is necessary as the *condition* of heaven, or as an indispensible *qualification* for it ?"

Thus suddenly, and with the utmost ease, we have a final settlement of this troublesome controversy! But, by this hasty decision, both parties will not be satisfied. The dispute may not be so very trifling on one side, however needless it should appear to have been on the other. If all who hold the doctrine of justification by faith alone, had so explained themselves that the most jealous advocates for good works could have no great occasion to dispute against it; still there may be reason enough to contend earnestly for it, as one of the most essential articles of the faith once delivered to the saints. Notwithstanding all acknowledge, that a recovery to personal holiness is an essential part of our salvation, and that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, upon the gospel plan; yet, between holding that we are *justified* by faith alone, and by faith in conjunction with good works; there is as wide a difference as between trusting entirely in the righteousness of Christ, and partly in our own righteousness, as the meritorious ground of acceptance with God. And if any man does the latter, an apostle will tell him, he is fallen from grace, and Christ shall profit him nothing. It may easily be taken for granted, that the doctrine of justification by faith is an error; and it may be shown, without much difficulty, that it is not a very dangerous error. But those who are convinced it is a gospel truth, and who rightly understand the reasons of it, will not so easily give it up, or cease to insist upon it, if they have any concern for the glory of God, or the salvation of men.

3. It may hence be seen that ministers of the gospel may well direct even unregenerate sinners to believe in Christ to the saving of their souls; and represent this as their indispensible duty, and the only way of peace and safety. We have the highest

authorities for such directions and representations. When the jailor said to Paul and Silas, " Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" they answered him immediately, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." And you see what was the answer of our divine Lord and Teacher, to those whose hearts were carnal, when they inquired what they should do that they might work the works of God. Nor can sinners have any thing to object against the reasonableness of such directions, or against their obligation to a compliance with them, except what must arise from the blindness, the hardness, the total wickedness of their hearts.

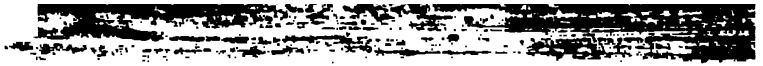
4. Hence let those who are following directions short of this, be cautioned not to make a righteousness of their external duties, or to think they are working the works of God, while they do not truly believe on him whom he hath sent.

Awakened sinners, if they reform their lives, and become constant in attending upon the outward and ordinary means of grace, often grow easier in their minds, thinking that they are now doing their duty, and are in a hopeful way to obtain mercy: thinking God's anger will now be turned away from them, since they are doing the best they can. Such self-righteous imaginations are undoubtedly the ruin of many souls. You ought not, indeed, to be careless about the externals of morality, nor to neglect a constant attendance on the instituted means of instruction and conversion. Nor are you to think there is no hope from the use of these means, while you are not true believers. There is encouragement to search the scriptures, since these testify of Christ, and a careful perusal of them is the way to see for yourselves, what you are to believe concerning him. There is encouragement to attend upon the word preached, and to be attentive to it, since faith cometh by hearing. There is encouragement to pray, since faith is

the gift of God; and since attempting to pray, in your present unhappy condition, has a tendency to convince you of the depravity of your hearts, and of your total want of the spirit of grace and supplication. But you ought to be told, and must be made to know, that however your lives may be reformed, and however much you may read, and hear, and pray; as long as your hearts reject the only Saviour, and you do nothing in the exercise of faith in him, you cannot please God, or be at all acceptable in his sight: nor can we assure you that he will ever give you renewing grace. You are condemned still, as much as ever; and the wrath of God, as much as ever, abideth on you; and is this a state in which you ought to make yourselves easy! Certainly, in a case of so much danger, and in a matter of such everlasting consequence, you ought to give yourselves no rest, till you have fled for refuge and laid hold on the hope set before you. Till you have received Christ, and are found in him; not having your own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Very pertinent to the case of an awakened sinner, out of Christ, is the angel's admonition to Lot, when led by the hand out of Sodom: "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

5. Let those who think themselves believers, be cautioned not to rest in faith, as if this were the only work required of them, or the only thing that will have any influence on their condition in the world to come. They who have believed in God, and also in Christ, must be careful to maintain good works. In point of duty, the gospel enjoins sinless perfection, as much as the law: nor are any under so great obligation as true believers, to abound in the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the

glory and praise of God. Let it also be remembered, that there is no other way to make your calling and election sure. That faith which does not imply a good heart, or is not followed by a good life, is not the faith of God's elect. It is dead, like the body without the soul. It is no better than the faith of devils. The only faith in Christ whereby we can be saved, is one which works by love, and leads to holiness in all manner of conversation. And in point of interest, how powerful are the motives set before christians, to works of faith and labors of love? For every good work, done from love to God and men, and in the exercise of faith in Christ, we are assured of receiving an eternal reward—an additional weight of glory. "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."



SERMON XIX.

ON THE PRESERVATION AND PERSEVERANCE OF TRUE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST.

1 PETER I. 5.

Who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.

PETER was called to the apostleship of the circumcision, as is observed by Paul; and his two epistles seem to have been chiefly designed for the converted Jews. James expressly inscribes his, "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." And this first of Peter is superscribed in a very similar manner: ver. i, "Peter, an apostle to the strangers scattered thoughout Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia, and Bethynia." They were thus dispersed, it is probable, by the persecution which began at Jerusalem soon after the ascension of Christ. The apostle begins his letter to them with a description of their character and state, and with the apostolic benediction: ver. 2, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied." Then, to console them under present sufferings, and in their exile from the earthly

land of promise, he reminds them of the better country, even an heavenly, which they had in certain reversion: ver. 3, 4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." In our text, he then assures them, that as this glorious inheritance was reserved for them, so they were effectually secured from falling short of its final possession. *Who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.*

The doctrine of the saints' perseverance, like the other capital doctrines of the gospel, is taught, at sundry times, in divers manners of expression, that it might be more fully understood: and to this end, as well as for the sake of greater variety of method, it may be most useful, many times, to follow the particular phraseology of scripture. Accordingly, on this text, it is proposed,

To consider the state and character of those here said to be kept—From what, all such are kept—How they are kept—The certainty that they shall be thus kept; and the objections which have been supposed to lie against this doctrine, that any are so infallibly secured by divine power and grace.

I. It is proposed to consider, very briefly, the state and character of those who are here said to be kept unto salvation. And,

1. They are such, and such only, as have been renewed in the spirit of their minds.

The persons spoken of in our text, had been before described as being, "Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience." It is supposed by the apostle that they had been effectually called to holiness and

virtue ; or, as another apostle expresses it, that they had been created unto good works. The election of particular persons to eternal life, is made evident to themselves and others, only by their begun sanctification, in effectual calling. Phil. i. 6, " Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Before regeneration there is no ground for confidence, concerning any, that they will ever be saved. " *Peradventure*, God will give them repentance ;" but, very possibly he may not. In this matter, " he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy."

2. Those only of whom we have any certainty that they will be kept unto salvation, are true believers in Christ.

Heb. x. 39, " We are not of them who draw back unto perdition ; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." None but those who thus believe, are entitled to the promises of persevering grace. 2 Cor. i. 20, 21, 22, " For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God. Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, is God : Who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." And Eph. i. 13, " In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." Persons may make a profession of the christian faith, and may have a strong conviction for a time that the gospel is true, and yet afterwards wholly apostatize, and become infidels. To believe to the saving of the soul, is to see the glory, as well as truth of the gospel, and cordially to embrace it : to embrace it, not only as true, but also as good. " With the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness." A hearty willingness to be saved from sin, and to be saved from wrath, and

entitled to the rewards of the righteous, in the gospel way, is essential to that faith by which alone a man is justified. And those only who are thus in a state of justification, have any promise of being kept from final perdition. Rom. v. 1, 2, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

II. Let us consider from what, and how far, all regenerate believers are *kept*. Certainly, not from all evil.

To the natural evils of this life, they are liable, in common with others. Yea, they have many times a double portion of temporal afflictions. The apostle, after having in our text, told his christian brethren of their perfect safety in regard to another world; "wherein," says he, "ye greatly rejoice;" immediately adds, "Though now for a season (if need be) ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations;" that is, trials. It is only when they have need of it, as well as deserve it, that those who are in the covenant of grace, meet with grievous troubles. But it is often needful, for the mortification of remaining corruptions, and for their furtherance in faith and holiness, that they should be visited with sore afflictions in this world. As God led his chosen people of old, forty years, wandering, by crooked marches, in a barren, howling wilderness, to humble them, and prove them, and to discover what was in their hearts; so, and for the same reasons, it is often through much tribulation that christians enter into the kingdom of heaven. And, as was said in that case, "He led them by the *right* way;" notwithstanding the tediousness, and tiresomeness of it; so it is in regard to the hard race set before the followers of Christ. It is the right way to make them

sensible of their sins, and to keep them humble. It is the right way to mortify their earthly and carnal affections, and to further their sanctification. It is the right way to give them an experimental knowledge that the grace of Christ is sufficient for them; as his strength is made more perfectly manifest, by their weakness. It is the right way to discover to them the reality of holiness, as well as the remainder of depravity in their hearts. See the next verse but one after our text: "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold, though it be tried in the fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." The apostle Paul also says, "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." For these reasons the godly are not preserved from natural evils in this life, any more than other men.

Nor are true christians kept from all moral evil, while here below. In many things the best offend; and in all things they come far short of sinless perfection. Nor are they always kept from falling into very gross sins.

But the doctrine of the saints' safety and perseverance is, that they shall infallibly be preserved from *final*, and from *total* apostacy. They are kept from the power of Satan, so that he cannot destroy them; when, as a roaring lion, he goeth about seeking whom he may devour. 1 John v. 18, "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." They are kept from the reigning power of sin: Rom. vi. 14, "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." They are kept from the fatal influence of the world. 1 John v. 4, "Whatsoever," or whosoever, "is born of God, overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

III. It was proposed to consider how, or by what influence and in what manner, believers are thus kept.

1. They are kept by the *power* of *God.* Their own exertions are necessary indeed; but to these they are divinely excited. They must work out their own salvation; but it is God that worketh in them to will and to do. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves," says the apostle Paul, "to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." As it is by the working of God's mighty power that a principle of holiness is created in the heart of man at first; so it is by his continual operation, though not in the same supernatural manner, that this principle is kept alive in good men, and that they bring forth the fruits of righteousness. There is the same difference between regeneration, and progressive sanctification, as between the production of the original seeds or roots of all kinds, and their being preserved, and caused to increase and multiply. It was by the *immediate* power of God that the first man, the first animal, the first plant and tree of every species, was brought into existence: but it is by his power co-operating with means, that all these kinds of creatures and things are kept in being, are propagated, and made to grow. And thus it is with respect to every radical faculty, or instinct, or law of nature. Thus it is in the spiritual, as well as in the natural world. Believers have been created unto good works, that they should walk in them. In order to this they need being *created* but once. They do not go on in good works, however, without assistance; nor does the implanted good principle in them increase in strength, or even continue what it was, without constant influence from above.

It is by the power of God, that the graces of good men are enlivened from time to time. Psal. cxix. 25, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word." It is by the power

of God, that christians are kept from being quite overcome by the temptations and conflicts which they meet with in the spiritual warfare. 1 Cor. x. 12, 13, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." And 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8, 9, "There was given me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." It is by the power God, that his people are supported under the heavy afflictions which they often meet with in the world. Isa. xliii. 2, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Thus are the godly supported and preserved by the power of God.

2 It is through faith, that christians are kept unto salvation.

To this purpose we have many other texts. "Thou standest by faith," says the apostle to the Gentile believer; "be not high-minded but fear." And, "The just shall live by faith," is a scripture saying often repeated.

It is through faith in *God*, that good men are supported, and kept from despondency and impatience, amidst all the dark scenes exhibited on the present stage, of confusion and disorder, of sin and misery. Isa. xxvi. 3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." And chap. l. 10, "Who is

among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." It is through faith in Christ, that the holiest of men are kept in a state of justification. They stand by faith, as well as have access by faith into a state of grace wherein they stand. If any man abide not in Christ, he is broken off as a branch, and will be burned. It is through faith in the promises of future happiness, that christians are supported under present trials, and animated to patient continuance in well-doing. Heb. xi. 1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

IV. We proceed to a consideration of the certainty there is, that all who are once true believers in Christ, shall be so kept, that none of them shall be lost, or fall totally from a state of grace.

The proof of this doctrine must be derived wholly from revelation: nothing can be concluded concerning it from reason, or the nature of things.

Holiness in creatures, however perfect, is not of such a nature, that it will necessarily be permanent, and can never be lost. The fall of angels and of our first parents, is a full proof of the mutability of perfect created beings; and of their liableness to lose all their virtue, if left to themselves. And certainly, such imperfect creatures as fallen men, when first regenerated, or as the most eminent saints are in this life, have no reason to trust in their own hearts, that they shall never fall away, and become again totally depraved; when the highest creatures, from a state of sinless perfection, have thus fallen.

Nor could it have been concluded from the perfections of God, without a revelation of his eternal purpose, that he would so love his regenerated children unto the end, that they should never again

lose his image and favor. God is immutable in his goodness: but this is no ground of certainty that the same individuals who were once dear to him, may not forfeit his love, and become the vessels of his wrath. This hath in fact been the case, in regard to the angels who kept not their first estate; and whom he hath reserved in chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.

But, although this doctrine of the infallible perseverance and final happiness of all true believers in Christ, rests entirely on divine revelation; yet, let us not be apprehensive that it wants proof. The testimony of the scriptures in support of it, it appears to me, is very express and abundantly full.

1. From the general descriptions which are given of the covenant of grace, it is evident that the salvation of all who have once an interest in this covenant, is effectually secured.

This is the covenant ultimately intended, no doubt, in those last words of David, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5, "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, for all my salvation, and all my desire." This covenant is described, and set in contrast with the covenant of works, Jer. xxxi. 31, 32, 33, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they *shall* be my people." And again, chapter xxxii. 40, "I will make an everlasting

covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that *they shall not depart from me.*"

The apostle to the Hebrews speaks of Christ as being the Mediator of a *better* covenant, established upon better promises: for the illustration and proof of which he quotes the foregoing words of Jeremiah. In another place he says; "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise, the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before us." If that divine influence which will infallibly secure the perseverance of believers, be absolutely promised in the covenant of grace, it may easily be seen that this new covenant is ordered in all things and sure; and that those who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon this hope, have firm ground for strong consolation. But, on supposition that glory is only conditionally promised, to those who are in Christ by faith, and grace to fulfil the condition is not divinely engaged, it will be difficult to see how the new covenant is any more sure, or any better established, than former covenants were. It was always certain that God would give the blessings promised, provided his people were steadfast in the covenant on their part. This was certain in the covenant with Adam, and in the Sinai covenant. All the fault—all the weakness—all the possibility of failure was, the fulfilment on the part of men was left to them: grace to keep them steadfast was not promised. And were the gospel covenant left, in the same manner, without the promise of persevering grace, this would be as liable to fail as former covenants. Were that the case, christians might trust in God, that if they endured unto the end, they should be saved; but that they should thus endure, they could only depend

upon themselves. After having fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us, whatever assurance they might have of this, their strong consolation must still be grounded on the strength and stability of their present good purposes and resolutions. Conditionally, their faith and hope might be in *God;* but for the performance of the condition on which all was still suspended, they could only have *self-confidence.* The hope that they should not be so weak as to fall away, amidst all possible temptations without any certain expectation of effectual divine aid, would be all the hope they could have. And could such an hope as this, be an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast? "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

We must conclude that the better covenant, established upon better promises—the covenant of which Christ is the mediator and surety, all the promises of which in him are yea, and in him amen, is not thus left to stand, one foot of it entirely upon the mutable goodness of man. Every part of it must rest on the promised grace of the immutable God, or it could not deserve the name of "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; ascertaining to the saint," all his salvation, and all his desire.

2. Besides these general descriptions of the covenant of grace, there are many particular passages of scripture in which this doctrine, of the infallible perseverance and salvation of the truly pious, is most strongly expressed. Among a multitude of others, which are full to this purpose, see the following texts. Job xvii. 9, "The righteous shall hold on his way." Psal. xxxvii. 23, 24, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord:—though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." Prov. iv. 18, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Isa. liv. 10, "The

mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." John v. 24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my words, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation." John x. 27, 28, 29, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Rom. viii. 28, 29, 30, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." And ver. 35—39, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?—Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Such are the plain and indisputable scripture proofs, of this important doctrine of the saints' perseverance. There are objections against it, however, which deserve a very particular attention. But the due consideration of these will require so much time, that it will be left for another opportunity.

SERMON XX.

ON THE PRESERVATION AND PERSEVERANCE OF TRUE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST.

1 PETER I. 5.

Who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.

IN a former discourse on these words, we considered the character and state of those who are thus kept—How far they are kept—In what way they are kept—And the certainty of their being so kept. It only remains, according to the method proposed,

That we consider, in the last place, what is objected against believing that all who are once in a state of grace, are so kept by the power of God, that it is impossible they should finally, or totally, fall away.

The objections which have been made to this doctrine, are many and of various kinds. They are taken from scripture; from the nature of things; and from the supposed bad tendency of teaching any men, that they are thus out of all danger in this life. I shall begin with the objections from scripture. Here,

1. Instances are produced of some who were unquestionably good men, that are thought to have fallen totally from a state of holiness for a time; though they were afterwards recovered by repentance.

The apostle Peter himself, the writer of our text, is commonly mentioned as one evident instance of this. He was a firm believer in Christ, and one of his most zealous followers, during the greater part of his public ministry. When many were offended at our Saviour's hard sayings, so as to follow him no more, and he said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away? Peter was the first to answer: "Lord," says he, "to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." At another time, when Jesus asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" and again, "Whom say ye that I am?" *Peter* answered, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God:" whereupon Jesus said unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Borjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Yet, at the time of our Saviour's arraignment before the chief priests, this same Peter thrice denied that he knew him. Must not this be a total apostacy? Was it not relinquishing the ground on which alone any can expect to be owned of Christ? He hath declared, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." And again, "He that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God."

To this it is answered; We do not dispute Peter's having been in a state of grace before; but we deny that his fall, though a very great one, was a total apostacy. The hating and giving up all, even life itself, for Christ, which is made necessary to being one of his disciples, and the denying him which

is inconsistent with this, we understand to respect one's stated, habitual disposition and choice; and not merely a transient act, or word, under extraordinary circumstances. Peter's situation was peculiarly trying. All his fellow disciples had before fled. He had followed his Lord, it seems, further than any of them dared to do. He was friendless, amidst triumphant enemies, determined, as he probably supposed, on the utter extirpation of the whole sect. He saw nothing but immediate death before him, if he confessed any connection with Christ. His faith was staggered; and his fears so far prevailed as to force from his lips a language foreign from the fixed habits and sentiments of his heart. As soon as Jesus looked upon him, he went out and wept bitterly. Being thus suddenly overcome, in such an hour of extreme temptation, may well consist, I conceive, with the character of a good man, retaining still the principles of virtue and goodness.

Another capital instance alledged, of a true saint's falling totally, though not finally from a state of grace, and the only other one which I shall now take notice of, is that of David. He was said to be a man after God's heart, even from his youth. He had long been truly pious and virtuous, in an eminent degree: yet he was guilty afterwards of the greatest crimes. If a righteous man may do such things as he did, retaining all the while his righteousness, what is there in all the abomination that the wicked man doeth, of which he may not be guilty?

To this it is replied; good men have sins which easily beset them. Grace does not eradicate at once, nor wholly in this world, constitutional passions and inclinations; though it generally in a good measure restrains them, when they would lead to transgress the rules of righteousness, or any of the known laws of God. The circumstances of David, in those days of his prosperity, exposed him in a peculiar manner, to presumptuous sins. His elevated station, no

doubt, made the things he did appear very differently to him, from what they would otherwise have done. The custom of kings, who considered the persons and lives of their subjects as being absolutely in their power, it may well be supposed, exceedingly blinded his eyes. And though his crimes were very atrocious indeed, yet, all circumstances considered, and especially considering his very deep repentance, we have no reason to conclude that he ever wholly lost the principle of true holiness. The steps of a good man are not so ordered by the Lord, but that he may often slip: his absolute safety is no more than this; though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him. The sanctification of saints is very imperfect in this life. They may be left to fall into particular sins, even beyond what are commonly committed by the unregenerate; yet the general tenor of their lives is materially different. It is a man's general course, and not one single act, or a few singular instances of either good or evil conduct, that gives a character. And this being kept in mind, we shall not consider all the sins recorded in scripture, of those who are acknowledged to have been godly persons, as any certain proof that the goodness of the regenerate may, for a season, be totally lost.

Respecting the instance now under consideration, it has been said that David was a *murderer;* and the apostle John expressly says, "No murderer hath eternal life *abiding in him.*"

To this I answer; It is far from being certain that David was a murderer, in the sense intended by John. The apostle was speaking of the love of our fellow-christians, as an evidence of our being the adopted children of God; and of our hating them as an evidence of the contrary. "We know that we have passed from death unto life," says he, "because we love the brethren; he that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his

brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." Now, it does not appear evident, nor probable, that David hated Uriah; or that he was actuated at all by malice against him, when he ordered him to be exposed in the battle, with a view that he might be slain. His motive was to conceal his own crime and Bathsheba's infamy; which he had much rather have effected in a more generous way: and his order to Joab can hardly, in strict propriety, be denominated murder, as it proceeded not from *malice prepense*. Much less is it hereby proved that he had that general hatred of good men, which constitutes the apostle John's murderer. He had occasion enough, indeed, to pray, as he did in his penitential Psalm on this occasion; "Deliver me from *blood guiltiness*, O God, thou God of my salvation."

It may be thought unaccountable, if David was a good man all this while, that he should discover no repentance till Nathan the prophet came to him, which was almost a year after the commission of these abominable crimes. But the answer to this is, that he probably supposed his sins were not known, except to two or three; and that he might have repented deeply of them in secret long before; though he did not think it his duty to confess them publicly.

There is no reason to conclude that either David or Peter, or any other saint that we read of, ever fell totally from grace, or became wholly destitute of holiness of heart. But,

2. Instances are brought of the *final* apostacy of some, whom the objectors suppose to have been once in a state of grace.

King Saul has been mentioned as an instance of this. That Saul died a wicked man, I admit, is highly probable: but it is far from being evident that he was ever a true saint. It is said, indeed, on

his being anointed king, that the Lord gave him another heart. It is said that he was among the prophets, and that he prophesied. It is said, in the latter part of his life, that the Spirit of the Lord departed from him. But all these amount to no proof that he was ever a subject of renewing and sanctifying grace. By the other heart said to be given him, may be meant no more than a spirit suited to the dignified station to which he was advanced. There is no necessity of understanding by it a truly pious and benevolent heart. His prophesying was no more than Balaam, and many other wicked men have done. The Spirit of the Lord departing from him, may mean only the withdrawment of those divine influences which are frequently given, for a time, to the unregenerate. From the whole scripture history of Saul, the probability is, that he was never a truly righteous man.

But *Judas* is the great instance insisted on, of falling finally from a state of grace.

That Judas fell from a high profession, and from an eminent visible relation to Christ, cannot be denied. That he fell *finally*, there is no reason to doubt. He is said, indeed, to have repented; when he brought again the thirty pieces of silver, "saying I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." But it is added, that when he had done this, "he departed, and hanged himself." And Christ calls him the son of perdition, and says expressly that he was lost. His, however, cannot be made out as an instance of falling from grace. He was doubtless never any thing more than a specious hypocrite. Our Saviour says to his professed disciples, John vi. 64, "There are some of you that believe not." The evangelist adds, "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him." We never read that Judas fell from grace. From the ministry and apostleship it is said he fell: and it is added, "that he might go to

his own place." Whereby is intimated, that he always belonged to the kingdom of darkness, and was a child of hell.

There is indeed one text respecting Judas, which, at first view, may appear favorable to the present objection. It is John xvii. 12, where Christ, in his last prayer with his disciples, says to the Father; "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition." Whence it may be thought that Judas was given to Christ in the covenant of redemption, and by effectual calling, though he was lost. Some who hold the doctrine of the saints' perseverance, to obviate the objection from this text, understand the particle *but*, to be here used in way of opposition, and not of exception. As opposing Judas to those given, and not as excepting him, as one of them that had not been kept. Thus: Those whom thou gavest me I have kept, and none of *them* is lost; but the son of perdition *is;* he not being one of them. But there is another way of explaining the words, which appears to me more easy and natural: namely, by supposing our Saviour is there speaking of those given to him as his apostles. In some parts of his prayer he evidently speaks of the whole number given to him to save; but from the 11—20 ver. of the chapter, I apprehend he is to be understood as speaking of his disciples who were then present. "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scriptures might be fulfilled." It seems natural to understand him here as speaking of his apostles—his visible church—his immediate attendants, whom he had been with so long, and was now about to leave. One of these was lost.

Not a single instance can be produced, I presume, of an evidently true saint, who has, that we have any certain evidence, finally, or totally, apostatized. And that such apostacy proves persons to have been only in the visible church, and not real christians, appears from 1 John ii. 19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us."

3. There are several passages of scripture which have been thought to imply a possibility of the total falling away, and final perdition, of those who were once in a state of grace.

One of these texts, is Ezek. xviii. 24, "When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abomination that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die."

The common answer to the objection grounded on these words, against the certain perseverance and salvation of saints, has been, that by the righteous man is here meant, only one who had that external righteousness which entitled to outward prosperity, according to the peculiar covenant which God made with the nation of Israel. And the whole chapter plainly shows, that it was respecting God's temporal dispensations towards that people, that he was there arguing and expostulating with them.

Another text supposed to imply that true believers may fall finally, is Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance."

Expositors who hold the doctrine now insisted on, have generally supposed that the persons here described, were only such as the stony ground hearers in our Saviour's parable of the sower, who had never the root of true holiness in their hearts; though they might have had the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, as well as great convictions, and much subsequent comfort and joy, from a false hope. And what the apostle says a few verses after seems favorable, I think, to this supposition: for he tells the Hebrew christians that he was persuaded *better things* of them, and things that *accompany salvation.*

But there is no need of insisting upon this construction, nor upon that of the passage in Ezekiel already mentioned, with a view to obviate the present objection; since there is another answer, and since there are some texts to which this answer will not apply. Our Saviour says, John xv. 6, "If *a man* abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men cast them into the fire, and they are burned." And the apostle, Heb. x. 38, speaks of God as saying, "If *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

To show that such texts as any of these are not inconsistent with the infallible salvation of all true believers, it is sufficient to observe that there is an *if* in them. That the assertion they contain is merely hypothetical, or conditional. That they only state a certain connection between apostacy and perdition; and do not say that either the one or the other will ever actually come to pass, in the case of true christians. Now, it is not the true doctrine of the saints' perseverance, that they will be saved whether they persevere or not. Nor doth its being said, If any do not persevere, they will fail of salvation, at all imply that good men may be left not to persevere. We readily grant, *If* a righteous man should wholly turn from his righteousness; *If* a holy man should lose all his holiness; *If* the best christians should

fall totally from the faith and obedience of the gospel, they would have no more part or lot in the covenant of grace, than any other wicked men and unbelievers: and their condition might be of all men the most hopeless. But that any true child of God, by regeneration, and adoption through Christ, ever was or will be left thus to fall away, we utterly deny. Accordingly the apostle, after the last quoted text, "If any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him," immediately adds, "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them who believe to the saving of the soul." True believers are kept unto salvation by the power of God; yet it is through perseverance in faith and holiness, that they are so kept. An event may be certain; and yet it may be certain that it will not be brought to pass except in one particular way. Of this we have a plain instance in the case of the shipwreck, related in the twenty-seventh chapter of Acts. Paul had said to those with him, "Be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; for thou must be brought before Cesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." Yet afterwards, when the mariners were about secretly to make their escape in the boat, "Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved." In like manner, though all true believers have the absolute promise of God, that not a soul of them shall perish; yet they cannot be saved except they abide in Christ. And there is the same need of their being warned of this, as the means of their safety; as in that case there was of the warning given to the centurion and the soldiers.

All the objections from scripture, against the doctrine of the saints' perseverance, are reducible, I think, to the foregoing heads; and are sufficiently obviated by the foregoing answers.

From reason, and the nature of things, it is objected,

1. That for men to be so kept by the power of God, that it is impossible they should fall away, is inconsistent with their being left to act as free agents. A creature left to the freedom of his own will, it is said, may choose the way which leadeth to destruction: nor can he be kept from this by the power of another, without being deprived of all power of his own, of acting freely. To this I answer,

1. If to keep men so that they cannot destroy themselves, be an infringement of the privilege of free agency; then, to be kept in any measure from sin and folly, must be an infringement of the same kind, though not in the same degree. According to the principle of this objection, God cannot restrain or influence men at all, by his Holy Spirit, without so far depriving them of freedom. I answer,

2. If being secured from apostacy and perdition by divine power, be inconsistent with human freedom in this world, it must be equally so in the world to come. Consequently, according to this objection, there can never be any such thing as the confirmation of rational creatures in holiness and happiness, without depriving them of all power of will, and making them mere machines. On supposition it will ever be possible for moral agents to be secured from destruction, why should it not, in the nature of things, be as possible in this world as in any other? But if God Almighty can never keep a free agent from sinning unto death, the moral creation is certainly in a very evil case. I answer, therefore,

3. The present objection is doubtless grounded on some wrong idea, either of moral agency, or of the manner of divine operation in keeping rational creatures from sin, and exciting them to duty. When good men are kept unto salvation by the pow-

er of God, it is not by any forcible restraint, or constraint, contrary to their own dispositions. God doth not work in them to do, whether they will or not; but first he works in them to will: and when once they are made willing, they act with freedom. As far as any one acts his own choice, he is a free agent. Or, will it be said, an agent is not free, unless he could will contrary to what he wills, as well as do contrary to what he does, if he would? Will any one insist upon it, that the essence of freedom, is to be able at any time, to will right, or to will wrong: to choose to do evil, or to choose to do well? But let us see to what this will lead. If this be essential to freedom, certainly God himself is not free. He can do whatever seemeth good in his sight—whatever he will: but he cannot will contrary to his will—contrary to his nature—contrary to his moral perfections. He cannot do, because he cannot will, any thing but what is wise, just, and good. Were not this the case, his infinite wisdom, justice and goodness, would be no ground of certainty, that he might not act in the weakest, most unrighteous, and worst manner, of any being in the universe. Let this notion of freedom, as essential to moral agency be true; that it must imply a power to will and do this way or the other, contrary to one's own mind, as well as according to it; and there is an end, not only of all possible confirmation of creatures, but of all immutability in the Supreme Being, further than free agency is overthrown. *God* is free, because he ever does what seemeth him good: not because it might seem good to him to do the reverse of what he does, in all instances, or in any instance. So likewise *men* are free, whenever they act their own choice: or whenever they choose to act according to their own disposition. This they may do, and yet be kept from ruining themselves, by having a good disposition given them, and kept alive in them; and by being habitually influenced to love the

ways of holiness, and to hate every evil and false way. But,

2. It is still objected, that for men to be so kept as to render it impossible they should fail of eternal life, is inconsistent with their being in a state of probation: for what probation can there be of those who are so upheld that they cannot fall—so justified that they can never come into condemnation?

I answer: to be able to judge whether there be any weight in this, what is meant by a state of probation must be understood. I understand by it, a state of trial, in order to a righteous retribution. Now, if men may be kept unto salvation, and yet be free agents, why may they not be so kept, consistently with all the ends of a proper state of probation? In order to a fair trial of men, it is only necessary that they should be able to act themselves, and to discover what is in their hearts. It is not needful by any means, that there should be no divine influence to incline them to good, or to keep them so inclined. Nor is it requisite that they should have a power of will, to give themselves a contrary inclination. It may be known what they are, without their being able to make themselves otherwise. That *God is* good, he discovers by *doing* good; notwithstanding his goodness is necessary and unalterable: and in like manner, men may discover the goodness of their dispositions, though they cannot will, or wish, to have opposite dispositions. That they *have* faith, may be manifest by their works, though both the beginning and continuance of their faith be from God, and not of themselves. Creatures need not be independent of their Creator, in order to its being known what they are, or what they deserve. They may be made upright, and kept upright, by divine power; and yet their uprightness be as real, as discoverable, and as justly rewardable, as if it had been self-created, and self-kept.

Such a self-determining power of will as some contend for, is so far from being necessary to discover what is in a man's heart, that it would render a discovery of it altogether impossible. Had *God* a power of willing and acting contrary to his perfections; what his perfections are, could never be at all known from his works. And had *men* the power of producing volitions in themselves, and of conducting contrary to their dispositions, what their dispositions are, could not be at all ascertained by their actions. Our Saviour says, "By their fruits ye shall know them." And he gives the reason—the only possible reason: "A good tree *cannot* bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." If a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, might bring forth evil things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, might bring forth good things; how could one ever be known from the other, by their fruits? The design of a state of probation is to discover what is in men's hearts: but had men such a self-determining power of will, that the sinner might act like a saint, and the saint like a sinner, in spite of their hearts, how could this end ever be obtained by any probation? Were men made to act contrary to their own hearts, by divine power, the end of a state of probation would indeed be frustrated. But this is not the way that God keeps good men. He works in them to will, agreeably to the new heart which he has given them. The doctrine of the saints' perseverance, is therefore no way inconsistent either with their free agency, or with their being proper subjects of a state of probation.

Yet, after all: the bad tendency of this doctrine, is alledged against it, as a serious and weighty objection. We are told, the natural and necessary tendency of it is, to encourage those who think themselves saints, in carelessness and sin: for what occasion have persons to give themselves any con-

cern about what they believe, or how they live, when there is no possibility of their being lost, or failing of eternal life?

To which we answer: A misunderstanding of the doctrine of the saints' perseverance, has a tendency to encourage self-deceived hypocrites in inattention and licentiousness, and may often have this effect; but not the doctrine itself, rightly understood. Did we teach that true believers may become unbelievers, or that those who have been born of God may live in sin, like the world that lieth in wickedness, and yet, that they will infallibly be saved, the objection would be just. But it is not so, when our doctrine is, that all real saints are kept unto salvation, "through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." What encouragement can this give, to cast off fear, to neglect prayer, to be inattentive to the word, or to live in allowed transgression and disobedience? The grace of God which bringeth salvation, effectually keeps true believers from all these. Those, therefore, who are not thus kept, have no part nor lot in the comfort of this doctrine; for they have abundant reason to conclude, that they were never in a state of grace.

It only remains that we apply the subject, in two or three serious practical inferences.

1. Hence we should hold fast, and contend earnestly for, this doctrine.

It appears very evidently, I apprehend, that the infallible safety of all true believers in Christ, is a plain article of the faith once delivered to the saints; and that the most specious objections against it have no solid foundation, in scripture or reason: and we may easily see that it is a very important doctrine. In regard to the comfort and edification of saints, it is certainly of great importance. Without it, the heirs of promise could not have that strong consolation which God is willing to give them. They could

have no anchor of their soul sure and steadfast. It is exceedingly necessary, likewise, to inspire them with courage in all the arduous conflicts of their spiritual warfare, and to fortify them with patience in running the race set before them. And it is also of great importance in regard to the conversion of sinners; as hereby the ministers of the gospel are furnished with a most powerful motive for winning souls. To induce the unconverted to make it their immediate concern to be reconciled to God, if this doctrine be believed, they may be told, that by so doing they will choose the good part, which shall not be taken from them. But, on the contrary, if the doctrine of falling from grace were true, this inducement to flee for refuge and lay hold upon the hope set before us, would be taken away. Saints would then be no more in a safe condition, than unconverted sinners. Both have conditional promises of salvation, and neither, on that supposition, would have any other. The former are assured that they shall be saved, on condition they endure unto the end; the latter, if at the end, they repent and believe the gospel. Feeble would be the argument to persuade men to seek an interest in Christ, that they may get into a state of grace, if in that state, we must tell them, there would be no safety. They might think it nearly or quite as prudent, to put off the matter until the closing scene; when there will not be time for their repentance to be repented of.

Thus important is this doctrine of the infallible salvation of true believers. Thus pernicious is the denial of it, in regard both to the edification of saints, and the conversion of sinners. Those by whom it is denied, with the other capital doctrines of grace, ought surely not to be followed, or any way encouraged; whatever they may say of their own goodness, however indefatigable they may be in making proselytes, or whatever high professions they may make of an ardent concern for the salvation of souls. In

reference to all such, the following apostolic warnings seem plainly applicable: Rom. xvi. 17, 18, "Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." And 2 John 10, 11, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds."

2. We may hence see the importance of not mutilating this doctrine, and should be very careful to maintain it pure and entire.

On no point, perhaps, is there greater need of caution not to put asunder what God hath joined together: the *way* and *end* of the righteous. It must not be thought that a righteous man may turn altogether from his righteousness; that those who were once savingly enlightened, may entirely fall away; that true believers, may become unbelievers; that good men may lose all their goodness and still retain their standing in the covenant of grace. If any man, or an angel from heaven, should teach such another gospel than that we have been taught, I will not say, "Let him be accursed:" but I must say, Let him not be believed.

From thinking that there is no sin in the weakness or want of faith, or love, or any other grace—that such mere deficiencies are no imperfections—that there are no good principles of action in any man—that all holiness, and all unholiness, consists in exercises only; some may be led to conclude, that the imperfection of saints can be no other than the inconstancy of their good exercises; and, therefore, that christians are sometimes perfectly holy, and sometimes totally sinful; though they never lose

their infallible title to eternal life. But if any one should hold thus, and teach men so, however much we may admire his talents, his courage, or his consistency; I think we ought rather to call in question the soundness of his premises, than to admit the truth of his consequence. Certainly, the scripture doctrine of the perseverance of saints, is not, that they shall be saved without persevering: or, that they are kept in the grace of God, without being kept by his power, from frequent, total apostacies.

3. Let believers be hence exhorted to improve the doctrine now insisted on, according to its evident design and tendency: to strengthen them in striving against all the enemies of their souls, with the animating hope of certain conquest; and not as any encouragement to remissness in their watch and warfare. That it had the former of these effects upon the apostle Paul, and not the latter, he tells the Corinthians. "I therefore so run," says he, "not at uncertainty; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away." Though he was certain of being thus saved, yet he well knew there was no other way for him to obtain everlasting life, or to escape eternal perdition, than by running with patience the race still before him, and fighting as one in earnest, the good fight of faith. And what effect he thought the certainty of efficacious divine influence would naturally have upon the faithful followers of Christ, appears from his exhortation to the Philippians: an exhortation which ought ever to be kept in remembrance, and with which I shall now conclude. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: For it is God which worketh in you, to will and to do, of his good pleasure."

SERMON XXI.

ON OBTAINING ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION.

HEBREWS VI. 11.

And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end.

WHEN once persons are converted, some seem to imagine that they have no further occasion for striving to enter in at the strait gate, or for working out their salvation. Hence, preaching terror to sinners, and comfort to saints, is supposed to be the whole business of gospel ministers: and, consequently, almost all their preaching, it is thought, should be to the unregenerate. If christians have not just at present all that consolation which might be wished, it is no such great matter, since very soon their joy will be full. Believers are absolutely safe; whereas unbelievers are in hourly danger of everlasting destruction: shall their case then be unattended to, while the time is spent in building up believers on their most holy faith? Thoughts like these are sometimes suggested, and perhaps oftener secretly entertained. They are specious; and at first view, appear rational. But, my brethren, these things ought not altogether so to be considered. As in

many other instances of superficial attention to subjects, there is a mixture in them of truth and error. Sinners are in awful danger, it is true; and saints are in a happy and safe condition. But that these last are in such a state of safety, that nothing further is necessary to be done by them, or for them, is a false inference. Christians must abide in Christ, or they will wither, become dead branches, and be burned. Believers must still, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, as ever they would hope to obtain eternal life. The inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" is not one which concerns the unconverted only. Those who ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, need directions; and not merely they whose backs are turned upon it, and who will follow no right directions, in a proper manner. Believers are not so kept by divine power, as renders their own vigilance and exertion to keep themselves in the love of God, unnecessary. As well may it be said, if persons are elected they will be saved, do what they will, as that the converted are in no danger, let them be ever so inattentive and slothful. The salvation of believers is indeed certain: but so is the salvation of the elect, who are yet unbelievers; and so is every event divinely decreed, or foreknown. Yet, in all cases, things are brought to pass in the way appointed. The means are decreed, as well as the end. Men must enter in at the strait gate, though elected; and they must go on in the narrow way, though effectually called, or they will not receive in the end, the salvation of their souls.

Accordingly, the inspired writers and preachers of the gospel addressed a great part of their discourses and writings, to those whom they considered as being already in a state of grace. And they addressed themselves to these, not in the language of consolation always, but often in that of doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Nor

did they exhort, warn, and admonish them, merely lest they should be a dishonor to the church, and lay stumbling-blocks in the way of those without; but also lest they should receive the grace of God in vain, and be lost themselves. It is plain they did not think that when they had won and wedded souls to Christ, they might then safely leave them; or that nothing more need be said to them except to banish their fears, and to confirm their comfort, by assuring them they were out of all danger. Among other proofs of this, of which the Bible is full, we have a very convincing instance in my text and context.

The apostle, in the foregoing verses of this chapter, is exhorting christians to steadfastness and perseverance in religion, and to vigorous endeavors after higher attainments in holiness, and in divine knowledge. See ver. 1, 2, "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God: Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead." He adds, ver. 3, "And this will we do if God permit." That is, he would assist them in making this proficiency, if opportunity should be given him to visit them again; and if they should be able to receive further instruction. He then warns them of the extreme danger they would be in of remediless destruction, if, after all that had been done for them, they should lose their religion, and prove apostates. Ver. 4—8, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth, which

drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

The apostle expresses, however, his charitable hope and belief concerning them, that they were not such as would be left thus to fall away: ver. 9, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." And the particular ground of his entertaining this persuasion in their favor, he lets them know, was the good fruit which they had hitherto brought forth. Ver. 10, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Then he exhorts them to go on as they had begun; that they, as well as he, might have reason to be more and more satisfied to the last, that they were not christians in name only, but in deed and in truth. This exhortation follows in our text: "*And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end.*"

It is proposed for the illustration of these words,

I. To explain what we are to understand by the full assurance of hope.

II. To consider the motives there are to give diligence to obtain such an assurance, and to keep it unto the end: and,

III. To show wherein, or in what ways the diligence of believers should be exercised, in order to this.

For explaining the assurance here spoken of, little need be said. In brief, to have the full assurance

of hope, is, for a person, on good grounds, to feel fully certain that he shall be saved.

This is what some call, (though improperly) the faith of assurance. It is never so called in scripture. The apostle speaks of the assurance of faith, not the faith of assurance, Heb. x. 22, "Having an high-priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." He means, in a firm belief of what the gospel reveals concerning the high-priesthood of Christ; his full atonement and prevalent intercession, in behalf of all his true disciples. But a man may have this; he may entertain no doubt of Christ's being able to save them who come unto God by him, and yet not be at all certain that he himself is one of this happy number. A man who is fully satisfied that the scriptures are the word of God, and that all the doctrines taught in them are infallibly true, has the full assurance of faith, respecting revealed religion; but yet, he may not be fully satisfied, at the same time, that he is a true believer. A man may be fully persuaded that every one who is created after God, and endures unto the end, in righteousness and true holiness, shall be saved; and yet may not be fully persuaded that he himself has been so created, and shall so endure. Faith is the substance of things *hoped* for; but it is not *hope* itself. The hope of salvation, if well grounded, is built; first, on the word of God; secondly, on faith in his word; and thirdly, on good evidence that we have saving faith. Had there been no revelation that there is forgiveness with God, or that he will give to any sinner eternal life; our hope of pardon and salvation, if we had any, would have been built upon no solid ground. Now there is such a revelation, if we do not believe it, we are still as much as ever without hope. If we do believe this revelation of grace and truth, but do not know that we believe to the saving of the soul; though we may have a hope, yet not the full assurance of hope.

A man may have some well-grounded hope of obtaining salvation, before he is a true believer. He may believe, or be rationally convinced, on scripture evidence, that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and that he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy; and therefore, that he may have mercy on him. When he is reconciled to God, submits to his sovereignty, and cordially acquiesces in the gospel way of peace, his hope is much increased. He now sees the substance of things hoped for; is persuaded of the promises, and embraces them. He flees for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him. Still, however, he may not think that what he experiences is saving faith; or if he thinks it is, he may not feel certain of it. He has new comfort and support; his mind is stayed on God, through Christ. He sees a glorious object of hope, and a glorious ground of hope. He may have full assurance of faith; while yet, that his heart is right with God, he is far from being fully assured: and, consequently, whether he has any part or lot in the promises of grace and glory, he cannot be certain. Besides being persuaded of the promises as true, and embracing them as good, one must have certain evidence of being a christian indeed, before he can have a well-grounded, full assurance of hope, respecting his own salvation.

Persons may be very confident that they are in a state of grace, and shall infallibly be saved, when they have no good evidence of their being new creatures; but their confidence is not well-grounded. Yea, some may have such an assured hope, as not to be troubled with any doubts concerning their future happiness; while, nevertheless, they live in vicious courses, and are far from being holy in any manner of conversation: but their hope is no other than that of the hypocrite, which will prove at last to be as a spider's web. A well-grounded, full assurance of hope, cannot be obtained without good evidence of a gospel

temper—a temper conformable to that of Christ—a heart to love God, and keep his commandments.

II. We will now consider the motives there are, to give diligence in this matter. The

1. Motive I shall mention is, that the full assurance of hope is a *possible* attainment.

Were it impossible; urging christians to take pains after it, would be of no avail. Despair of success, in any pursuit, cuts the sinews of all exertion. And with many professors, it is probably thus, in the present case. They do not think that by any diligence which they could give, it would be possible for them ever, in this world, to make their calling and election sure: and therefore they rest, and endeavor to make themselves easy, in a doubtful hope. But that there is no reason thus to yield to absolute discouragement in this case, provided persons are real christians, may appear from a due attention to the following things:

(1.) That there are absolute divine promises of the final salvation of all who are once true believers in Christ. If this were not the case, it would indeed be a vain thing for any to think of obtaining the full assurance of hope, respecting their eternal happiness. If men might be in a state of grace to-day, and in a state of wrath to-morrow; if true believers were sometimes left to fall away and be lost, and if the best of them might be thus left, the true believer, notwithstanding any certain evidence he might find of his past or present faith and holiness, must remain in utter uncertainty respecting his final salvation. But the infallible perseverance of all real saints is a plain doctrine of scripture. Our Saviour hath assured us, that every one who heareth his word, and believeth on him that sent him, "hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation." That to those who

hear his voice and follow him, he will give eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. And in the writings of his apostles a never failing connection is asserted between effectual calling, justification, and glorification: Between the beginning of a work of special grace in any, and its being performed until the day of Jesus Christ; between being begotten again unto a lively hope, and being kept by the power of God unto salvation. If, therefore, any can be certain of their being true christians, they may be equally certain that they shall so endure unto the end as to be finally saved.

(2.) From the essential difference which we are taught there is between the sanctifying fruits of the Holy Spirit, and any thing ever experienced by the unregenerate, that good men may attain to the full assurance of hope, by giving proper diligence, is reasonably to be supposed.

Things different in their nature, it is probable, may be certainly distinguished, by those who have their senses exercised to discern good and evil, if they will take due pains in attending to them. Were there no difference only in degree of goodness, between the regenerate and the unregenerate, it might be impossible for those of the former character to know that they were not of the latter: more especially since that height of holiness, from the lowest degrees of it, which is necessary to denominate one a true saint, is no where ascertained in scripture. But that those who are in a state of grace, differ only in degree of goodness from those who are in a state of nature, is not the case, according to the word of God. The unregenerate are there said to be *dead in sin.* They are described as being of that carnal mind which is enmity against God; which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Our Saviour says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh:" and the

apostle Paul tells us he knew that in him, that is in his flesh, dwelt no good thing. Now, whether one be wholly sinful, or has some real virtue and religion, it is reasonable to suppose may be known, on thorough examination, by one who has eyes to see and a heart to understand.

(3.) There are many infallible marks of grace given in the holy scriptures, whereby the heirs of glory are to be known. Several of these are laid down by our Saviour in the beginning of his sermon on the mount: as humility; godly sorrow; a sincere desire of personal holiness; meekness, mercifulness, and purity of heart, The apostle John mentions brotherly kindness as a certain evidence of saving grace. "We know that we have passed from death unto life," says he, "because we love the brethren." And the love of God and of Christ, are much insisted on in this view. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."—"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." And, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

(4.) Christians commonly pass through various changes, which are designed for their trial, that they may better understand their true character. They are tried frequently by prosperity and adversity: by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report, to prove them, and to let them know what is in their hearts. Now, under all these trials of their gratitude and moderation, of their meekness, humility, patience and submission, it is reasonable to believe that, in due time, with proper attention, it may be known what manner of spirit they are of. But,

(5.) That the full assurance of hope is a possible attainment in this life, we have unquestionable evi-

dence from instances recorded in scripture of those by whom it was actually attained. David speaks the language of assurance respecting his future happiness, Psal. xvii. 15, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." Peter said to his risen Saviour, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." And Paul says, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.—Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

2. To induce christians to diligence in seeking this assurance, it ought to be considered that it is a difficult attainment; and one not to be expected without laborious application.

The want of a conviction and belief of this, is probably the occasion of remissness in professors, and of their neglecting the diligent use of those means which such an attainment requires, as often as their discouragement from an apprehension of its impossibility. As long as people are looking for miracles, or for something of the nature of immediate revelations to assure them of their salvation, and imagine that little or nothing done by them is necessary, they will naturally be slothful in this business. God may, in some instances, have given the assurance of hope to particular persons; by suddenly lifting upon them the light of his countenance, when they were taking no great pains in religion; but I am persuaded that this is not his ordinary way; and that generally, it is only by much diligence that christians arrive to a well-grounded assurance of their being in a state of grace. Of this we may be convinced,

(1.) By the many pressing calls to self-examination, which we find in the holy scriptures. To this purpose, besides our text, see 2 Cor. xiii. 5, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves." And Gal. vi. 4, "But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have confidence in himself alone, and not in another." That is, in the evidence of his good estate which he himself perceives; and not merely, or mainly in the charitable opinion of others concerning him. See also, 2 Pet. i. 10, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure."

It is evident from such exhortations as these, that the ordinary, if not the only way for christians to obtain the confidence of a well-grounded hope, is by painful diligence. If assurance of one's own salvation were of the essence of saving faith, as some have taught; or if it were God's ordinary way to give this assurance by impulses, or immediate suggestions; or by bringing comfortable texts of scripture, unsought for, into the minds of persons, as others seem to have supposed; or if the full assurance of hope were a common and easy attainment, what occasion could there be for these earnest admonitions?

(2.) There is reason to believe that giving diligence is necessary in christians, to make their calling and election sure, because of the many specious appearances of virtue and religion, which are often found in false professors.

Some are ready to say, A man is at no loss to know when he loves his children, or when he loves the world and the things of the world, or when his appetite is pleased with certain kinds of meats and drinks: why then should one who loves God and Christ in sincerity, or who has a true relish for heavenly things, be at any loss about it; or be obliged to take much pains before he can be certain of it?

But to this it is replied, There are many counterfeits of the love of God, and Christ, and things heavenly; which, at first sight, or on a cursory examination, have a very plausible and fair appearance. It is to be observed that the objects of religious affections are things invisible; and things concerning which men are very liable to entertain erroneous conceptions. As the heathen had gods many, and lords many; so there may be as many different ideas of God and Christ, among the professors of christianity. And such gods and christs as exist only in the imaginations of men, may be very pleasing to the carnal mind. It may be thought impossible that so great a change as being brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, should not be perceived and known by a person at the time: but every great change in the views and feelings of a man, is not a saving conversion. When it is considered how many sorts of religion there are in the world, and even in the christian world; how many kinds of conversion, and in how many different ways men imagine that they are going to heaven: it may well be believed to be no easy matter for one to know that *his* religion is pure and undefiled, or not essentially false; that *his* conversion has been sound and genuine, and that *he* is certainly in the narrow way to eternal life, which few there are who find.

(3.) The great imperfection of good men, renders it much more difficult for them to be well assured that they have any real goodness.

The beginning of true holiness in the regenerate may be compared to a little leaven hid in three measures of meal; or to a grain of mustard seed sown in the earth. And even after more than common growth in grace, for a considerable length of time, there is still a law of sin—a remaining body of spiritual death, which may well occasion many doubts, as well as much grief and trouble. "Perfect love

casteth out fear :" but who, in this life, is made perfect in the love of God, or in any other grace ?

(4.) That the full assurance of hope is an attainment which requires much diligence, may well be believed, because of the many subtile windings of self-love, and the extreme difficulty of knowing what is the bottom principle of action in men.

It is said, Psal. lxiv. 6, " The inward thought of every one of them, and the heart is deep." It is said, Jer. xvii. 9, " The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ; who can know it ?" There may be much seeming zeal for God, much apparent brotherly kindness and charity, and much external righteousness, as well as religion, when all springs, at bottom, from selfish principles, or merely interested motives. I may add,

(5.) That the difficulty of certainly knowing one's own true character and state, is much increased by the great proneness in men, and even in good men, to err in judgment, more especially respecting themselves. From pride, and the partiality of self-love, we are very apt to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think ; and can more readily perceive the least mote in our brother's eye, than a beam in our own. This makes it easy for one to get a hope in regard to his own goodness ; and difficult to know that one is not deceived.

3. The vast importance of this attainment, is the last motive which I shall mention, to give diligence to get and maintain a well-grounded, full assurance of hope.

Unless persons are convinced of this, they will not be persuaded to be at the necessary trouble and pains, however they may be made to believe there is a possibility of attaining to such an assurance. But it is obviously so great a happiness to feel certain, on

good grounds, of the pardoning mercy of God, and of an infallible title to immortal glory, that it seems needless to say much concerning the importance of it; and it is difficult to say any thing on so common a subject, which has not often been said. I shall, however, suggest a few thoughts, of which it is necessary that professors should be frequently reminded.

(1.) Consider the great danger there is of resting in a false hope. Many do so, undoubtedly. We read much, in the holy scriptures, not only of hypocrites, but of their hope and confidence. In the parable of the ten virgins, the five foolish, it seems, expected to go in with the wise when the bridegroom should come; and did not know that their lamps were gone out, until it was too late to replenish them with oil. In another parable, our Saviour represents the hope of many false professors as being so strong, that they would not easily give it up, even at the last day. Matt. vii. 28, "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" But he adds, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you." So again, Luke xiii. 25, 26, 27, "When once the Master of the house be risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us: and he shall answer and say unto you, I know not whence ye are. Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." We are not indeed to understand this so literally, as to suppose that hypocrites will not know what their state is before they come to judgment, and receive their final sentence.

after the resurrection. But we are to understand these sayings of our Saviour and Judge, as being designed to teach us, that many self-deceivers are exceedingly confident of their good estate; and hold fast this confidence to their dying hour.

(2.) Let it be considered how terrible a thing it must be to entertain a false hope, till it is too late to rectify mistakes; and to go away into everlasting punishment, when one was in full expectation of going to life eternal. In the next verse after the last quoted passage, it is said, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." Job says, "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?"

(3.) To show the importance of having the full assurance of hope, I may observe, that it must needs give much uneasiness to pious persons, when they seriously think of it, to feel any considerable uncertainty in their own minds, whether they shall be happy or miserable to all eternity. The apostle to the Hebrews, speaks of them who, "through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage." And this must be the case with true believers, if all their life-time, they have only a doubtful hope of escaping everlasting destruction. The thoughts of dying, while this is their condition, must be exceedingly terrifying to them.

(4.) Consider, on the other hand, how happy and safe at all times, those may well feel who have such good evidence of being in a state of grace, as puts the matter beyond all reasonable apprehension of being deceived.

Provision is made in the covenant of grace, for this full comfort of the assured believer. "God,

willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel," it is said, "confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before us." The apostle adds, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the vail." Every true believer in Christ experiences something of the comforts of this hope, which is set before all: but the christian's comfort must be far more strong and perfect, when he is sure of his title to the promises of grace and glory, than it can possibly be while he has doubts and fears that his heart may deceive him, and that he hath no part nor lot in that everlasting covenant which is ordered in all things, and sure.

A well-grounded, full assurance of hope, will not only bear one above the fears of death, but will make the thoughts of it a powerful support under all the ills of life. Well may those take joyfully the spoiling of their earthly goods, who know in themselves that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. When wicked men revile and persecute them, and say all manner of evil against them falsely for Christ's sake, well may they rejoice and be exceeding glad, if they can be certain that they are christians indeed: for then their reward will be great, and so much the greater, in the kingdom of heaven. Well might we consider the heaviest bereavements, and the most lasting temporal pains and afflictions, light, and for a moment, were we fully assured that they will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Well may those who have this assurance, persevere with patience in well-doing, however hard and difficult the duties to which they are called, and whatever discouragements they may have to encounter. Well may they "be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in

the work of the Lord," when they "*know* that their labor is not in vain in the Lord."

But it is time we proceed, as was proposed,

III. To consider wherein, or in what ways, christians must show diligence, that they may get this full assurance of hope, and retain it firm unto the end.

1. It will readily occur to every one, that they must be diligent, thorough and careful, in the business of self-examination.

If the time be known when they thought themselves first converted, they should examine this conversion with carefulness, again and again, to be satisfied that it could not be the effect of fear and hope only, operating upon the natural principle of self-love; but that a new heart must have been given them, and a new spirit put within them. A heart to love God, not merely for his apprehended singular goodness to them; but for his own sake, and for what he is in himself. A heart to repent of all their sins against him, with godly sorrow; to submit to, and rejoice in, his supreme dominion and absolute sovereignty; to choose him as the portion of their soul, and to make the advancement of his interest and declarative glory their ultimate and chief end. A heart to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and to receive him cordially, as their prophet, priest and king. And a heart to love good men with complacency, and all mankind with a pure and fervent charity. Whether they had then such a temper of mind given them, as Christ exhibited, and as the gospel requires.

But whether you can date the time of your supposed conversion or not; you should examine the past and present exercises of your heart, and your general course of life; and see if in these you can find clear evidences of having been created in Christ

Jesus unto good works. Particular attention should here be paid to what have been your feelings, and thoughts, and actions, under the various trials and changes through which you have been called to pass: under the merciful and afflictive dispensations of Providence, and the kindnesses and ill treatment received from your fellow-men.

But self-examination alone, however frequent and particular, will not be enough to give all true believers full assurance of their godly sincerity. Many such may examine themselves, and pore upon their experiences, for months and years; and yet, after all, be as full of perplexity and doubts as ever. I add, therefore,

2. Giving diligence to get a more accurate and thorough understanding of the various doctrines and precepts of the gospel, is altogether necessary. Persons may have that degree of knowledge in divine things which is absolutely required in order to saving faith; and yet not know enough to be able to obtain a full assurance, upon rational grounds, that they are true believers. They may not have those determinate and correct ideas of the perfections of God, of the character of Jesus Christ, of the essence of holiness, and of the nature of heavenly happiness, that will render it possible, without an immediate revelation, to be quite certain that their good feelings toward these objects of religious desire and love, may not proceed from some misapprehensions concerning them. The only ordinary way, or at least one necessary way, to have this put beyond all reasonable doubt, is to give attention to reading, to meditation, to doctrine. This is a way divinely prescribed and encouraged. It is written; "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." It is written; "If thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;

yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." But,

3. In connection with this, there must be growth in grace. It is said, 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." And to see that these things be in you, and *abound*, is the diligence which christians are there exhorted to give, that they may make their calling and election sure. "For he that lacketh these things," says the apostle, meaning he who has but a low degree of them, "is blind and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins;" that is, he must be uncertain of his pardon and begun sanctification.

It is hardly supposable that christians, when they have but little grace, can have good reason to be confident of their having any. Nor is it desirable that they should have this confidence, under these circumstances. When love is very low, fear is not likely to be cast out, except by delusion: and fear is then very necessary, as a stimulus to christians to work out their salvation with due earnestness and diligence.

4. In order to the full assurance of hope unto the end, there must be patient continuance in well-doing. Those who have believed in God, and in Christ, must be careful to maintain good works. To this the apostle has particular reference in our text. Having spoken of his being persuaded better things of the Hebrew christians, and things which accompany salvation, because of their work and labor of

love, in ministering to the saints, he desires them universally to go on in like works of liberality, that they might have, and retain to the last, the full comfort of the gospel hope.

Though external good works alone, are not an infallible evidence of internal holiness; yet they are a necessary evidence. If the tree be good, the fruit will certainly be so, in some good measure. It is indeed hard to say how much of unchristian conduct may possibly be found in one who has been made partaker of a christian temper, and has received the grace of God in truth. But it is easy to see, that while christians are not eminently holy in their conversation, they are not likely to have a well-grounded hope that they have any holiness of heart at all. Our Saviour insisted often on this evidence. See Matt. vii. 24, "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and *doeth* them, I will liken him unto a wise man, that built his house upon a rock." John viii. 31, 32, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." And John xv. 8, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

The present discourse will now be concluded with an application, in a few brief inferences.

1. It may be seen from what has been said, that if real christians walk in darkness, and have little comfort respecting their future state, the fault must be in themselves. Their want of even the full assurance of hope, is not because of any want of gospel promises sufficient to give them full consolation; nor because of any want of marks of grace, in the holy scriptures, sufficiently plain, and easy to be understood. It can be only because they have not those marks legible enough, in their own hearts and lives; or because they are blind, and cannot discern

things spiritual, with necessary clearness and discrimination. And their want of more manifest evidences in themselves, or better discernment, is because they have not given due diligence to grow in grace, and in religious knowledge.

2. Hence, have not many supposed converts, too much reason to call in question the truth of their conversion? Is not the subsequent course of many who have made a hopeful beginning, very different from that desired of christians by the apostle in our text? While under awakenings and legal convictions, how eagerly engaged were they to hear the word and attend the worship of God, in season and out of season! but since they have obtained a hope, do they continue to show the same diligence? There are many, undoubtedly, who rest in what they once experienced, to whom the description given of Ephraim, and of the stony ground hearers, is too applicable. Their goodness was as a morning cloud, and the early dew: they received the word with joy; but their religion having no root, soon withered.

3. According to our subject, what shall we think of those who never found any occasion for diligence in this matter? who, since they first got a hope, have had no doubt concerning their salvation?

We should think, perhaps, that they *may* be real christians: but their being always so certain of it, cannot rationally be thought any thing in their favor. Whatever may be their actual condition, we have great reason to suspect that their assurance of hope is not well founded: more especially, if they appear to be children in understanding; as is commonly the case, with such confident professors.

4. From what has been said we may infer, on the other hand, that for persons to be doubtful of their good estate, who once had a comfortable assurance

of it, is no such dark symptom, as hath sometimes been supposed.

Some have considered the assurance of hope, as being essential to saving faith; and some, perhaps without fully imbibing that opinion, have been exceedingly troubled with the words of the apostle, Heb. iii. 14, "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence, steadfast unto the end." But I take the meaning of these words to be; if we retain our confidence in the truth of the gospel, and the steadfastness of our adherence to Christ and his ways; not the confidence of our being true christians. It is evident, however, I apprehend, from the preceding discourse, and even from our text itself, that the assurance of hope is not of the essence of saving faith; and, consequently, that all doubting of one's own title to eternal life, is not the damning sin of unbelief; nor any certain evidence that one may not be a true believer. Yet,

5. Let doubting christians, and christians in general, be hence exhorted to diligence, in all proper ways, that they may have the full assurance of hope unto the end.

For this purpose, be frequent in serious self-examination. For this purpose, be very attentive to improve the divinely instituted means of instruction in religion and growth in grace. For this purpose, be careful to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly, as the grace of God that bringeth salvation teacheth. For this purpose, be fervent in supplication for the sanctifying and enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit. It was the prayer of David, and it should be the prayer of every saint: "Uphold me according to thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope.—Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

SERMON XXII.

ON THE NECESSITY OF HOLINESS HERE, IN ORDER TO HAPPINESS HEREAFTER.

ROMANS II. 6, 7.

Who will render to every man according to his deeds; To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life.

GOD's people of old were admonished, Jer. vi. 16, "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Nor is this a needless admonition still, notwithstanding the much clear light, on moral and religious subjects, which hath since that time come into the world. Still, on almost every article of faith, and branch of duty, very different opinions are entertained, among the learned, as well as the illiterate. And indeed, at first view, the way which leadeth unto life seems to be differently marked out to us, even in the holy scriptures themselves. Sometimes one is told, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. A man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law. To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." In other

places it is said, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." But how are these different representations to be reconciled? We are not surely to understand that there are two ways of salvation, for fallen men, revealed from heaven. We are not to imagine that those who believe the gospel shall be saved, though they neglect good works, and live in sin: and that those who turn from their transgressions, and do that which is lawful and right, shall be justified by the deeds of the law. So that every one may have his choice, either to be saved by Christ without personal holiness; or to work out his own salvation, without being indebted to Christ, and to free grace. There is but one gate, and one way, to life eternal: and, "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way." Neither the unrighteous, nor the self-righteous, shall inherit the kingdom of God. Personal holiness, and relying alone, for justification, on the imputed righteousness of Christ, are both made necessary, in the grace of God which bringeth salvation. That there must be some faith, and some works, in order to a man's being saved, all denominations of christians will admit. But, rightly to divide the word of truth on these subjects, so as to give to faith, the things that are faith's, and to works, what belongs to works, requires some study and care.

By the words now before us, we are led to consider the province and necessity of good works, relative to the salvation of men. The apostle is here speaking of the righteous retributions which will be made to every man, in the judgment of the great day. He is addressing himself to the Jew, who excluded

the Gentile from salvation because of his unrighteousness; and yet expected to be saved himself, though equally unrighteous, because of his covenant relation to God. See the context, ver. 1—9, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself: for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them who commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them who do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God: Who will render to every man according to his deeds; To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile."

In attending to the words chosen to be particularly insisted upon, it is proposed to consider;

I. How we are to understand that God, in the day of judgment, will render to every man according to his deeds.

II. What is implied in the character here given, of them to whom he will render eternal life.

III. How universally, and how far, this character is necessary, in order to the rewards of heaven, upon the gospel plan. And,

IV. Why it is necessary.

I. We will briefly consider how it is meant, that God, in the day of judgment, will render to every man according to his deeds.

By the deeds of men we are to understand, not merely the works of their hands, but also their words, and thoughts, and dispositions; or whatever constitutes their personal characters. It is not to be supposed, however, that God will render to every one just what he has personally merited, and no more. Certainly he will not render to the righteous all the evil they have deserved; and he will render good to them undoubtedly, far beyond their personal desert. But it is to be understood,

1. That every good man will receive the rewards of heaven; and that every wicked man will be condemned to the pains of hell.

This is agreeable to the frequent representations of scripture. See John v. 28, 29, "The hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

2. We are to understand that God will render to all the impenitent workers of iniquity, according to strict justice. That he will condemn them respectively, to those several degrees of punishment which they have merited; all circumstances being fully considered.

To this purpose it is said, a few verses after our text; "For there is no respect of persons with God: For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law; in the day that God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." And to this purpose our Saviour told the

impenitent sinners of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, that it would be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for them.

3. It is to be understood that there will be differences made among the righteous, in proportion to their works of faith, and labors of love; in proportion to the trials and difficulties through which they have passed; in proportion to their different personal characters upon the whole.

When they that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; among them that shall be raised to everlasting life, there will be a difference in the lustre with which they shall shine; as between the firmament and the stars, and as one star differeth from another star in glory. We proceed to consider,

II. The character given in our text, of those to whom God will render eternal life.

They are described, you observe, by the objects of their pursuit, and by their manner of seeking. In both these, the children of God are manifest; as differing from the unregenerate.

We will begin with attending to the objects of their pursuit: or the things which they seek. In all the works of rational beings, some end is sought: and this, accordingly as it is important or unimportant, worthy or unworthy, very much stamps the characters of persons and of actions. Whatever pains a man may take, whatever sagacity he may discover in the prosecution of his designs, or whatever good he may accidentally do; yet, if his motives are evil, or mean and low, he is not much to be commended. Men may be very industrious in their lawful callings; and may be very useful members of society by their labors; but if the only inducement they have is to get the world, that they may consume

it upon their lusts; or that they may hoard it up, to gratify their pride and avarice, no great applause is due to them. Yea, men may abound in fasting and prayer, and in giving alms, merely that their piety and charity may be admired; and they may have their reward; but not at the resurrection of the just.

Those to whom God will render eternal life, are here characterized as aiming at noble and worthy ends: "Glory, honor, and immortality." These expressions, though they seem nearly synonymous, may admit of an explanation somewhat distinct.

1. The persons described by the apostle, seek for *glory.*

Not the glory of this world, or of the princes of this world, which cometh to nought. As most of the phrases used on spiritual and divine subjects, are taken from the names of earthly things; so the word glory, according to its primary root, and original use, is said to signify the gravity, or weightiness of material substances; as grain, silver, gold, &c. by which their value is estimated. As applied to rational beings, and things of a spiritual nature, it is meant to express, either their intrinsic and real excellence, or its display and manifestation.

Intrinsic excellence, of the moral kind, is called glory, in a sense very suitable to the forementioned derivation of that word: as excellent men, are men of weight and worth; whereas those destitute of virtue, are light and worthless, like dross or chaff. Thus it is said, "Abimilech hired vain and *light* persons, which followed him." And of Belshazzar it was written, "TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting." So in the first Psalm, after the character and happiness of a good man, it is added, "The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away." And in another Psalm, to set forth the want of virtue in man-

kind of all orders and degrees, it is said, "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity." In opposition to this, the lowest, weakest, poorest good man, is a man of weight; that is, of solid worth. To seek for glory, in this sense of the word, is to seek for moral excellence, or personal holiness. And so the word seems to be used, 2 Pet. i. 3, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue." The apostle adds, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature."

The word glory, also signifies happiness; especially spiritual and heavenly happiness, consisting in, or resulting from, the vision and fruition of God and Christ. See Rom. v. 2, "By whom also we have access by faith, into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." And 1 Pet. i. 8, "Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." In what the happiness of heaven will most essentially consist, we are taught, Rev. xxii. 1, "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb." Seeking glory implies, then, seeking personal holiness, and that happiness which arises from seeing the glory of God, our Creator, and of Christ, our Redeemer, most highly advanced.

2. Those to whom God will render eternal life, are such as seek for *honor*.

Not honor from men, certainly: to seek this in the manner many do, is inconsistent with the seeking here spoken of, John v. 44, "How can ye believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek

not the honor which cometh from God only?" It is this last, the honor which cometh from God only, that is intended in our text. This is one great object of that hope by which christians are saved, and of that faith whereby they overcome the world. And this is promised them by their Saviour and Judge; Rev. iii. 5, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." It is said, 1 Cor. iv. 5, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God." That is, every man who has done well, or meant well; however his good deeds may have been concealed, or misrepresented; or however he may have wanted the means of doing the good for which he had a willing mind. He who improves his talents with fidelity, whether many or few, will be openly honored with that transporting approbation, Matt. xxv. 21, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." This honor is for all his saints, and for this they seek.

3. They seek for *immortality:* or incorruption, as the original might be rendered.

The apostle has reference, probably to the resurrection. He elsewhere tells us, "Christ hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light:" meaning no doubt, the immortality of the body, as well as of the soul: when "this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality." These are the grand objects of those who are risen with Christ, and seek those things which are above.

The manner of their seeking these things, is next to be considered. It is said in our text to be, *by patient continuance in well-doing.* More particularly,

1. It is by *well-doing*. This implies a sincere and universal obedience to the will of God, as revealed in his word. It implies that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and that living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, which the grace of God that bringeth salvation teacheth. "Then shall I not be ashamed," says the psalmist, "when I have respect unto all thy commandments." Well-doing, with respect to ourselves, implies prudence, sobriety, self-denial, and temperance in all things. Well-doing, with respect to our neighbor, implies a careful discharge of all the duties of righteousness and charity, of truth, honesty, and kindness, towards all with whom we have any connection or intercourse. Well-doing, with respect to God our Maker, implies a constant attendance upon all his ordinances; walking humbly before him, being resigned to his will, and worshipping him in spirit and in truth.

2. There must be *continuance* in well-doing. It is said, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21, 22, "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and, The sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." And many such there have been in all ages of the church. But those who so run as to obtain, persevere in well-doing to the end of their mortal race. Matt. x. 22, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." And Rev. ii. 10, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

3. *Patient* continuance in well-doing is mentioned in our text. And to hold on their way, in such a world as this, christians have need of patience. Often they are rewarded evil for their good, and hatred for their love. Often they are persecuted for righteousness' sake, and bitterly reviled and slandered for their steadfast adherence to truth and duty. Many are the temptations they meet with to recompense evil for evil, or to cease from doing good. But amidst all discouragements, the righteous, through divine grace, hold on their way, and bring forth fruit with patience.

III. We proceed to consider how far, and how universally, well-doing, in this manner, and from these motives, is necessary in order to eternal life, upon the gospel plan. And here,

1. It is certain that no more than *imperfect* well-doing, is now made necessary, for this end.

Not that the gospel, as a rule of life, is any lower in its requisitions, than the original law of works. In this sense Christ came not to destroy the law or the prophets. He came not to abrogate the original law of the Lord, which was perfect, and to set up a new law, conformable to the moral capacity, or disposition, of fallen, imperfect creatures. Heaven and earth might be easier overturned, or destroyed, than one jot or tittle of the moral law be abated. Perfect conformity to the eternal *rule of right*, in heart and life, must always be incumbent on every rational creature, under all dispensations, and in all worlds. In point of *duty*, sinless perfection is as much required of us as it would have been if Christ had not undertaken our redemption; and as much required of fallen men as it was of our first parents while upright in Paradise; or as it is of the angels in heaven. But in point of divine *acceptance* it is not required. From even the moral law, as a covenant of

works, believers in Christ are released. The apostle illustrates this by the similitude of the marriage covenant, in the beginning of the seventh chapter of Romans. Having observed that a woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is loosed from that law, he says, ver. 4, 5, 6, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law—For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Again he says, Gal. iii. 10, "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But he adds, ver. 13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." By his obedience and death, a foundation is laid, that the sins of believers in him may be pardoned; and that their imperfect obedience, when only sincere, may be graciously accepted. Such is the obedience of the best saint on earth; and such is all that is now required, as an evidence of a title to the kingdom of heaven.

2. No well-doing *all our days*, is made necessary by the gospel, for this end. It is not required that, from the beginning of our existence, we should have rendered even *sincere* obedience to the commandments of God, as that without which we cannot have admission into his kingdom of glory. All men by nature are dead in trespasses and sins; destitute entirely of that good disposition which is the root of all righteousness and true holiness. Let our external actions, therefore, have been ever so blameless, or ever so excellent, in the eyes of men, they can

have no moral goodness in the sight of God, until a new heart is given. Could any of us say, that we have outwardly kept all the commandments from our youth up, unless we have been created through Christ Jesus unto good works, we never have kept one of them in sincerity and truth. But notwithstanding this, and notwithstanding we may have lived many years in total unholiness; if then, being renewed in the spirit of our minds, we truly turn our feet unto the testimonies of the Lord and walk in them, our end will be everlasting life. Yea, though we have lived in the grossest transgressions and iniquities; though our sins have been of a scarlet and crimson dye; if we cease to do evil, and learn to do well, through faith in the atoning blood of our Divine Redeemer, we shall no less certainly be received into the holy society of saints and angels in heaven, than if our characters had always been white as snow. Paul tells Timothy, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." And he says to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

3. Continuance in well-doing at all, in this world, is not made so universally necessary, in order to happiness in the world to come, as to admit of no exception.

We must believe this, if we believe that any are saved, who die in the earliest part of infancy. We must believe this, if we believe that any adults are regenerated, and brought into a state of grace, through repentance and faith in Christ, in the very last moments of their lives. What time had the thief upon the cross, for patient continuance in well-doing, previously to his going to heaven; when our Saviour said to him, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise?" Every one who heartily repents and embraces the gospel—Every one who is created anew in Christ Jesus, hath everlasting life: and, whether he instantly dies, or lives a hundred years afterwards in this world, shall not come into condemnation.

The sum of what the scriptures teach, concerning the necessity of personal holiness here, in order to heavenly happiness hereafter, appears to be this. All who are born of the flesh, must be born of the Spirit, before they die, or they can never enter into the kingdom of God. All sinners must repent, in this space of repentance, or their sins will never be blotted out. And all penitents, as long as they live, must bring forth fruits meet for repentance: they must endure unto the end, in sincere obedience of the law and gospel, or they will not be saved.

IV. It was proposed to inquire and explain, why so much as this, in us, or even any personal holiness at all, is now necessary; since, "by grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves;" and since, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth."

But on this head a few hints must suffice, and may be sufficient.

1. Regeneration, and repentance, must precede a gospel title to eternal life, because they are pre-requisite to that faith by which alone a man is justified.

To believe to the saving of the soul, is not merely to be persuaded of the truth of the gospel; it implies, moreover, that we cordially embrace its promises: that we desire the salvation it offers, and receive Christ as our Saviour and Lord. But thus to believe, is evidently incompatible with the disposition of an unregenerate, or an impenitent sinner. It is impossible that one who is unrenewed in the spirit of his mind, and totally destitute of true holiness of heart; or one who has no godly sorrow for sin, or sincere desire to turn from it, should be willing to be saved by Christ, as he offers to save men; or should receive him in all his mediatorial offices, and consent to be his disciple and subject.

2. Believers must maintain good works, because these are the natural and necessary fruits of a right spirit, and of union to Christ by faith. The apostle Paul says, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" And our Saviour hath said to his disciples, "I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." There is no such thing as being saved, upon the gospel plan, without abiding in Christ, any more than without becoming united to him at first: and the necessary consequence of abiding in Christ, is a patient continuance in well-doing. "He that saith, I know him," says the apostle John, "and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. Hereby we know that we are in him."

3. Well-doing, from an honest and good heart, is necessary in those who belong to Christ, notwithstanding they are not under the law, as a covenant of works, but under a covenant of grace, because a

recovery to holiness is an essential part of his salvation; and a part which he stands engaged to see accomplished, in all whom the Father hath given him, from the time of their coming to him.

See Matt. i. 21,—"Thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins." Eph. v. 25, 26, 27, "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." And Tit. ii. 13, 14, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

The improvement of what has been said, may be in the following particulars.

1. From this subject it may be easily seen, that the good works of men are no part of the *condition*, of their title to eternal life.

Believers have the promise of salvation—a promise which can never fail, before they have done any good works; and their title to it, in point of merit, is grounded wholly on what Christ has done and suffered; and not at all on their well-doing. Were not this the case, none could be saved, except those to whom time is given for doing the will of God, after they have been created unto good works.

2. We may hence also infer, that it is not accurate to consider good works on earth, as being a necessary *qualification* for heaven.

Holiness of heart, is indeed absolutely necessary, to qualify any one for the joys above. But infants, and even adults, may be made perfect in holiness at

Though it is said, God will render to every man according to his deeds; yet to some, it is said, he will render *eternal life*, and to others, "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish." And our Saviour hath told us, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." This is the plain doctrine of scripture, abundantly inculcated: That all who are good men in this world, shall be happy for ever; and that all who die wicked men, shall be for ever miserable: and that both the happiness of the one, and the misery of the other, will be great in degree, beyond all our present conception.

Such retributions, however, are so evidently disproportioned to the different personal characters, and merits of the righteous and the wicked, that they have often been disbelieved, or objected against, as being altogether unequal, and unjust.

But those who make this objection, and some who have attempted to answer it, seem not to think, or not to remember, that the righteous are saved by grace, through faith. It is true, there is an *essential* difference, in personal character, between saints and sinners, however great the imperfection of saints may be, or in whatever that imperfection may be supposed to consist: whether in the *weakness* of their graces, or merely in the *inconstancy* of their good exercises. But on no supposition, is this personal difference so infinite, as between the eternal rewards of heaven, and the endless pains of hell. On the contrary, some who are finally good men, have been greater sinners, and deserve a more intolerable punishment, their whole lives taken together, than some who die in their sins. The only foundation of all the rewards of the righteous, is the righteousness of Christ; in which an interest is obtained, and kept, by faith alone. This is a full solution, and the only one, I apprehend, of the forementioned specious difficulty.

SERMON XXIII.*

ON THE PERFECTION OF SEPARATE SOULS IN HEAVEN.

HEBREWS XII. 23.

—And to the spirits of just men made perfect.

MELANCHOLY is the present condition of fallen man. At his best state, he is subject to many imperfections, and experiences much vanity and vexation of spirit. But, if life be prolonged, soon do the evil days come, and the years when there is no pleasure. Soon, the strong men bow themselves, and the keepers of the house tremble. Soon, the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl broken. Soon, the dust returns to the earth as it was, and man goeth to his long home.

Melancholy are the visible appearances of death, in its approaches, and in its consequences. All the passages out of this world are dark and dreary. Dark also is the grave, whither we are going; and dark, by the light of nature alone, is the everlasting residence of the dead:

> "The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
> No traveller returns."

* Preached at the funeral of Col. ISAAC LEE; who died December 13, 1802, in the close of the 86th year of his age.

Jerusalem; and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all *and to the spirits of just men made perfect*; and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel."

The evident design of this whole passage is to show, that christians are brought by the gospel, to the knowledge of heaven, and to a participation with saints and angels there, in the vision and fruition of God, far beyond what good men were under the law. But from the short part of a sentence taken for our present subject, which mentions the spirits of just men made perfect, we are led to inquire,

I. Whose spirits these are: and,

II. Wherein their perfection consists.

As one of the elders asked John, in the Revelation, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" so we may naturally inquire, in the first place, Whose spirits are these spoken of in the text? and what was their former condition?

They are said to be the spirits of *just men:* that is, the spirits in heaven, of men who were just while here on earth. But who in this world, since the fall of Adam, ever deserved the name of just men? Is it not written, "There is none righteous; no, not one?"

I answer; It is written, "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation." And we often read of *the just*, where reference is plainly had to men in the life that now is. Solomon says, indeed, "There is not a just man upon earth:" but he explains himself by adding, "that doeth good and sinneth not." It is undoubtedly true, that all have sinned;

not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor." And the following words of the apostle James; "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue,—that man's religion is vain." A just man is no slanderer or reviler; nor one that will go beyond or defraud another, in any matter. He is a man of truth and punctuality in his dealings, and of integrity and faithfulness in whatever business he undertakes, or station he sustains. He is one that makes conscience of observing the rule of our Saviour, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them." And that of the apostle, "Render to all their dues: tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honor, to whom honor."

2. A just man will be as careful to render to God, his due, as to men the things which are their's. He will no more neglect the duties of religion, than be negligent in the discharge of social duties. However honest men may be in their dealings; however punctual in paying their debts, and equitable in all respects in the treatment of their neighbors; yet, if they never inquire, nor concern themselves, what they shall render to the *Lord* for all His benefits; if they restrain prayer, pay no attention to the word of God, and are men of no religion, they are not just men in the sense of scripture; nor can they with any propriety, be so called. To rob God, is certainly as unjust, as to wrong our fellow-men.

3. A just man is upright in heart, as well as one that walks uprightly. "He is not a Jew," says the apostle, "who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew that is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." A man may be very virtuous, and very religious, external-

Having seen what are the essential characteristics of just men on earth;

II. We are to consider the perfection of the spirits of such, when translated to heaven. Here,

1. They are made perfect in holiness.

He who is entered into that rest, hath ceased from sin. Ho longer is he subject to carnal appetites, unruly passions, or any moral imperfections. From these, the best of men in this world are far from being wholly free. Paul found a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind: and to his christian brethren, the Galatians, he says, "The flesh lusteth against the spirit,—so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." But from the flesh—from the law of sin—from the remainder of depraved nature, believers are perfectly delivered when the body dies.

Nor is this all the moral perfection of pious souls departed. Holiness is not a mere negative; consisting in freedom from sin only. This is one thing implied in it; but it implies, moreover, all good principles, and all the fruits of active righteousness. These are all comprehended radically, in universal benevolence of disposition. "The end of the commandment is charity." In this the spirits of just men in heaven, are perfect. They are perfectly disposed to render honor to whom it is due; to take complacency in the holiness, and to rejoice in the happiness of all around them, and above them, whether the Creator of all, or their fellow-creatures.

2. Compared with us, and with themselves while here below, they are perfect in knowledge. 1 Cor. xiii. 12, "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

3. The saints above are made perfect in happiness.

erous society of their fellow-creatures, all of whom are perfectly holy, and perfectly happy.

In this wretched corner of the universe where we now live, a good man can find few objects to excite in him much complacency or joy; nor can he avoid seeing many which must give him quite contrary sensations. The most happy have their calamities, and the best, their imperfections: And how many are there in whom there is hardly any thing but sin and misery to be seen? Were it not for the faith of future and invisible things, it might admit of a question, perhaps, whether the purest benevolence, in such a world as this, would not be a source of more pain than pleasure—of more disgust, than satisfaction.

But heaven is a state of society perfectly pleasing to a benevolent mind. There the soul of a good man, made perfectly good, finds every one of a disposition, and in a situation, exactly agreeable to its highest wish. There are seen thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, of holy angels, which kept their first estate, and have been improving in knowledge, and in every glorious excellence, and rising higher and higher in happiness, ever since their creation. There are seen, "a multitude which no man can number," of the redeemed from among fallen men; "of all nations, and kindreds, and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hand." There are all the excellent of the earth, of former ages; and all the pious dead, of our own relations, connections, and acquaintance. And these, how altered! how astonishingly altered, from what the best and happiest of them ever were, while here below! *They are made perfect.* Now, in the kingdom of their Father, they shine forth like the sun, in the beauty of holiness, and in the perfection of happiness. To a benevolent mind, and much

the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of his love, which passeth knowledge.

It was his promise to his mourning followers, when he was about to be taken from them, John xiv. 2, 3, "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." And it was his prayer for them, John xvii. 24, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Now, when this prayer is answered, and this promise is fulfilled, how unspeakable must be their felicity? Then they join, with rapture unutterable, in singing, as it is written in the Revelation, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Let us now consider, what application and uses should be made of this subject.

1. We may hence learn what manner of persons we must be, and what faith we must have, if we would hope to be partakers of the blessedness spoken of; and should be excited to seek earnestly the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.

In the iv. chap. of this epistle, having reminded the Hebrews of their unhappy ancestors, who could not enter into the land of promise because of unbelief, the apostle says; "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

To hope for an entrance into the heavenly Canaan, we must have faith in God, and also in Christ. It may seem hard to believe that creatures so vile, can ever be partakers of such glory and blessedness.

Let us then see that we be holy, as he who hath called us is holy; and that the lives we live in the flesh, we live by faith in the Son of God; as ever we would hope to die the death of the righteous, and that our last end may be like his.

2. Our subject, and the hope herein set before us, may well support believers under the heaviest temporal bereavements, and other tribulations. The end of all things, and certainly the end of all the afflictions of the righteous, is at hand. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." The life of man, however full of trouble, is of few days. If, by reason of strength, it be more than four-score years, yet it is soon cut off. The apostle reckoned "that the sufferings of this present time, were not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. And we know," says he, "that all things work together for good, to them that love God." Again he says, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

3. We may hence learn how the present mournful solemnity ought to be improved.

The decease of a neighbor and friend, in some views, ought ever to be considered as an event, for the present, not joyous, but grievous. Attending a funeral is called, going to the house of mourning. And if we consider how death entered into the world, why it passes upon all men, and what are often its terrible consequences, sober sadness evidently becomes us whenever we see a fellow-mortal thus turned to destruction. Nor can we well refuse the

evils to come, of which he was anxiously apprehensive. And, we have reason to hope and trust, he is entered into peace, where the wicked cease from troubling. He early made a profession of religion; and has given good evidence ever since, of the sincerity of his profession. For constancy in attending upon the public worship of God, and a very close attention to the ministry of his word, he has had few equals. Even to old age, he was rarely ever absent from the solemn assembly. No inclemency of weather, or slight indisposition of body, would detain him from the sanctuary, on appointed seasons. Equally constant was he likewise, in the more private duties of devotion. Nor was he one of those who seem to be religious, while very deficient in morality, and the social virtues. In his public, civil capacity, he exerted himself with more than common zeal, for the suppression of vice, the support of justice, and the preservation of peace. And in his private intercourse and dealings with mankind, his character was unimpeachable. It is true, he escaped the woe of our Saviour, unto them whom all men speak well of. In him was verified the proverb of Solomon, "He that is upright in the way, is abomination to the wicked." There were not wanting those who reviled him, and said evil of him. Nor can it be denied that he was subject to like passions as others; but I know of nothing ever plausibly alledged against him, which ought to shake our charity for him as an honest and good man.

Yet, before God, he abhorred himself as a vile sinner, and often repented, as in dust and ashes. Near the closing scene, he expressed a deep sense of his utter unworthiness of divine mercy: and of the impossibility of his being saved from wrath, otherwise than of free grace, through the infinite atonement of Jesus Christ.

Upon the whole, his mourning friends have the comfort of a confident hope, that he was one of the

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